No. 1117
15 October –
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PRIVATE EYE

THAT TV DEBATE
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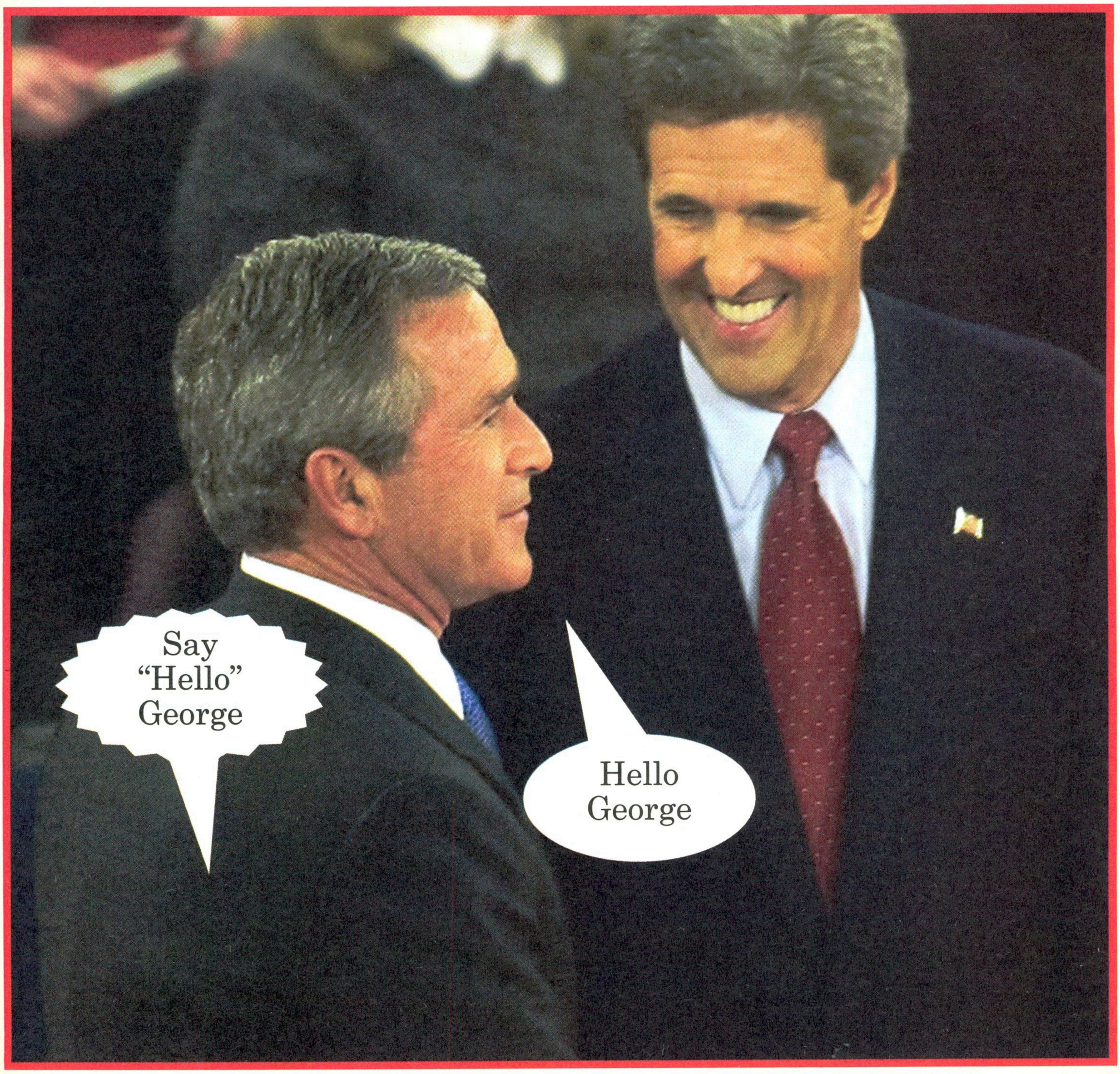

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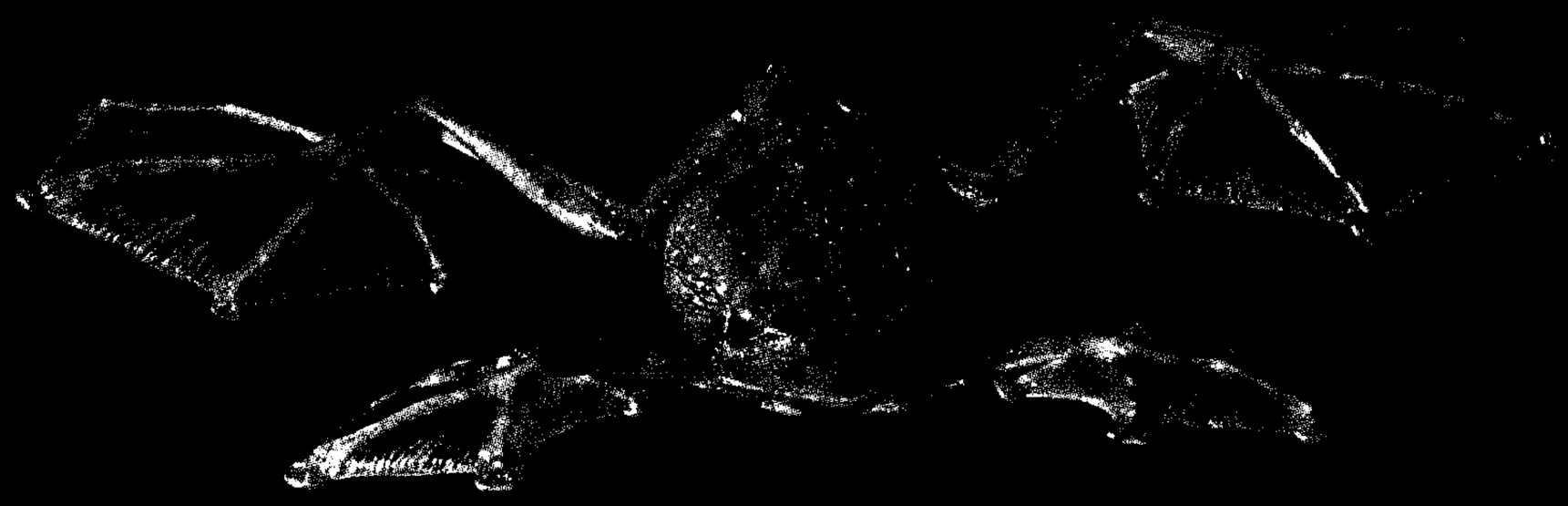

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Gnome

A LOT of media coverage has been given to my decision not to continue funding the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP).

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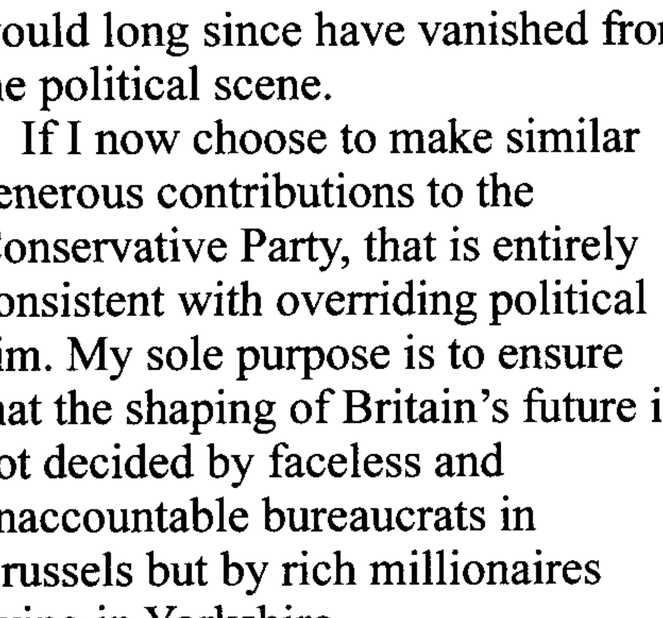
If I now choose to make similar generous contributions to the Conservative Party, that is entirely consistent with overriding political aim. My sole purpose is to ensure that the shaping of Britain's future is not decided by faceless and unaccountable bureaucrats in Brussels but by rich millionaires living in Yorkshire.

E. Strobes,
pp. not-yet-Lord Sykes,
Dunukipin, Howard's Way, Yorks.



"I can't find that WMD report"

Bush whacking

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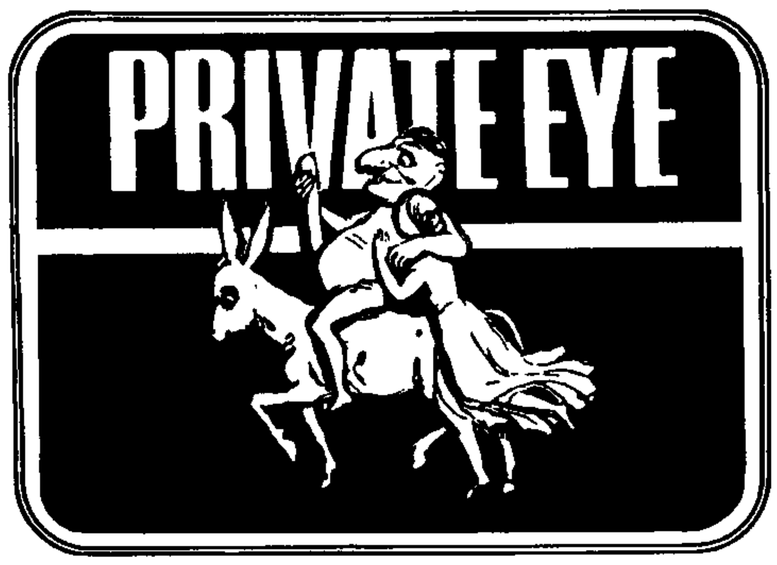
ABC



PAUL STRETFORD, the *Eye*'s favourite football agent, is back in the news two years after demanding the *Eye* pay him and his company, Pro-Active Sports Management, £50,000 in libel damages after the *Eye* drew attention to some of their murkier dealings in the football transfer market. The threatened writ never materialised.

Last week the sensitive Stretford was the star prosecution witness as the sobbing victim of an alleged bid to blackmail him for huge sums of money after he had poached the granny-loving and commission-generating Wayne Rooney from rival agents. Hardened London gangster Tommy Adams had an undefined role in the peculiar goings-on recounted in court.

At the beginning of this week, however, the prosecution suddenly announced that it was dropping the case after seeing documents over the weekend that showed Stretford had given false evidence to the court. So much for the reputation the *Eye* allegedly damaged!

ONLY a year after buying Powderject Pharmaceuticals from Blairite groupie Paul Drayson for £542m, the new American owner must be wondering whether it was quite the bargain it thought.

The Powderject factory on Merseyside, which was due to deliver enough vaccine for 2.5 million flu jabs to the department of health this winter, has now had its licence suspended for six months because of "quality control" problems.

Drayson and Powderject first came to national attention soon after 9/11 when the company won a £32m government contract for smallpox vaccines without the project going to tender – shortly after Drayson had made two £50,000 donations to the Labour party. Last year he gave a further £505,000 to the party, just six weeks after Blair awarded him a peerage. Cushioned with the £100m he earned personally from the sale of Powderject, he can afford such generosity.

Drayson now says he hopes to act as "a bridge between business and politics" in the House of Lords. If so, he may find his own business record coming under rather closer scrutiny – including his spell running Justin de Blank, the foodshop and restaurant group, in the early 1990s. By the time of his departure, this 30-year-old business had been forced to close its main London shop and the eponymous founder, Justin de Blank, had to find a new buyer to keep the company afloat.

Drayson has airbrushed this episode from his CV. Although he has given many boastful interviews about his varied career – including a brief stint at British Leyland, followed by a move to Trebor and his creation of a mini-biscuit snack called the Scoopie – the name Justin de Blank has never once been mentioned. Why so coy?

LITTLE-watched Channel 5 has been enjoying its moment in the limelight this week, with reality show *The Farm* hitting headlines across the tabloids.

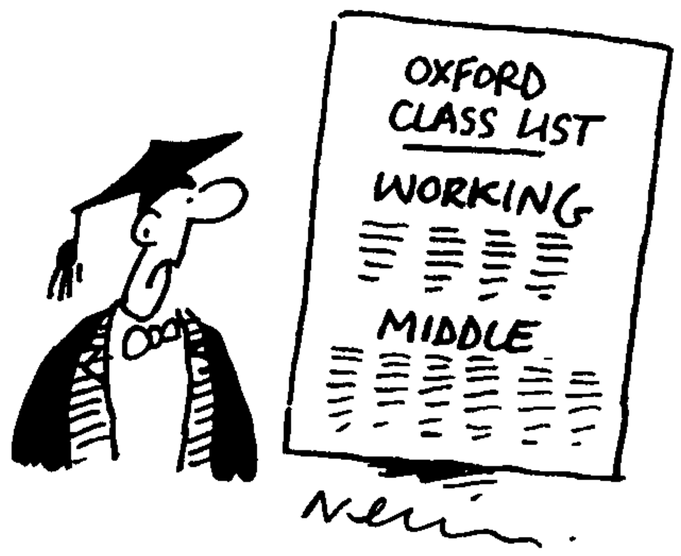
The channel seemed rather less keen to court publicity for another of its programmes, *Britain's Favourite Comedian*, a countdown of the nation's top comics "based on a comprehensive Mori poll".

Last Saturday night, with the news bulletins full of the aftermath of hostage Ken Bigley's murder, the station quietly announced the winner… Billy Connolly.

SIR Peter Davis, recently deposed as chairman of Sainsbury's with a huge pay-off, presented the findings of his "employer's taskforce" on pensions to a fringe meeting at Labour's Brighton conference.

Among his main concerns was a lack of enthusiasm among employers for private pensions for their workforces. The obvious reason for that many companies are scared stiff that if they push the wrong pension product, they will end up on the end of a mis-selling charge. As a result, millions of employees are failing to make any provision for their old age.

Sir Peter understandably failed to explain the employers' paranoia over pensions. It is largely down to the great mis-selling scandal of the 1980s and 90s, when hundreds of thousands of people were inappropriately lured into personal pension plans. Chief among the culprits, with tens of thousands of mis-sold pensions and a huge fine for not compensating victims properly, was insurance company Prudential, headed for much of the time by… Sir Peter Davis!



A MEETING on mobile phone safety heard some brain-fryingly bad science from the chief of the Parent Teachers Association, David Butler, last month.

Butler claimed that "from a perspective of pupil performance, it can enhance things, because the heating effect actually improves the neuron transfers between neuro pathways and therefore your thinking ability goes up."

Even the host of the event, mobile phone company O_2, must have been baffled as to where such cheering information could have come from. Experts from the National Radiological Protection Board describe it as extremely unlikely and say children should continue to use mobile phones as little as possible.

Which raises the question of what Mr Butler was doing on a pro-mobile phone panel anyway, when all official advice, including the Stewart Inquiry, recommend against frequent mobile use by children. It also makes a mockery of O_2's claims not to market phones to children.

PETER Mandelson is settling down nicely in Brussels, having installed himself in a smart 16th-century house in the city's lively Petit Sablon district.

And the name of the road which has the honour of accommodating the great Mandy? Here is the street-sign:

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NEWS

DAYS after Audit Scotland (the Scottish national audit office) heavily criticised private security company Reliance [*sic*] for losing prisoners in its care, the firm has won similar work in England.

Last year the Scottish prison service awarded Reliance the job of escorting prisoners, despite its being the least suitable of the shortlisted bidders. It was the cheapest, however. After mislaying several prisoners in the first few months of the contract, Scottish justice minister Cathy Jamieson lost patience and called in Audit Scotland. The watchdog found that Reliance was responsible for 12 of the 23 incidents, with police, courts and prison service cock-ups accounting for the other 11.

Despite this woeful record, Cleveland police authority has awarded a 25-year contract worth £1.5m a year to Reliance to provide "security services" at a number of custody centres and police stations.

THE playground spat between accountants and lawyers over the government's new rules on disclosing tax avoidance schemes has finally been resolved.

The bean-counters, led by Aidan O'Carroll of tax avoidance specialist Ernst & Young, had whinged that it was unfair for lawyers, under cover of "legal privilege", to keep quiet about the scams they sold while accountants had to spill the beans to the Inland Revenue. This would upset the all-important "level playing field" in these matters (and with it the inalienable right of accountants to make vast profits while ripping off other taxpayers).

The fudge agreed by paymaster-general "Red" Dawn Primarolo means lawyers still won't have to disclose the schemes they have sold, but the clients who buy them will. Naturally, however, their solicitors will be prepared to do this for them... for the appropriate fee.

The result is a nice little earner for m'learned friends, but not at the cost of the accountants' lucrative tax avoidance business, which can carry on regardless.

HAVING used the privy council to overturn a high court decision to allow the displaced islanders of Diego Garcia to return to their homes – 40 years after a previous Labour government had booted them off it – the government is getting into yet another bind.

The islanders were curtly told their islands were unsuitable for resettlement because of "global warming" – a problem that doesn't appear to have troubled the US air force, which runs the place. However, global warming and flooding have not yet come to Crawley, West Sussex, where the first wave of refugees from Diego Garcia have decided to head. Ninety have arrived so far and another 3,000 are waiting in the wings.

The high court has now ordered West Sussex county council to provide assistance for them until they can make claims for benefits in six months' time. Meanwhile Tony Blair, who insisted the islanders' rights be overturned by the privy council in the first place, has written to local MP Laura Moffat saying: "The islanders should be able to support themselves before choosing to travel to the UK." All around can be heard the sound of people washing their hands...

Street Of Shame

WITH a general election looming, "new" Labour hoped it could rely on at least one pundit. David Aaronovitch, the government's most stalwart defender in Fleet Street, would surely use his columns in the *Guardian* and *Observer* to persuade disenchanted readers to vote for the Vicar.

But a slight problem has arisen. On 29 April 2003, writing about the search for WMDs in Iraq, Aaronovitch gave the following pledge: "If nothing is eventually found, I – as a supporter of the war – will never believe another thing that I am told by our government, or that of the US, ever again. And, more to the point, neither will anyone else. Those weapons had better be there somewhere."

Fortunately, he added, "they probably are". Whoops!

MARKET researchers advising *Metro*, Associated Newspapers' pisspoor London freebie, have been trying to find out how long it takes for copies to run out at London's main railways stations.

However, those conducting the research were given a curious warning. "PLEASE NOTE: you do not have permission to be conducting this research at these stations. Therefore if you are approached by anyone from the station, please inform them that you are waiting for a friend. Under no circumstances must you say you are working on behalf of *Metro*."

Quite why Associated is so unwelcome at railway stations that it has to resort to cloak and dagger research remains a mystery.

THE Times had a fit of feminist indignation last Friday when former BBC director-general Alasdair Milne suggested that female executives were to blame for the dumbing-down of the corporation. Milne was dismissed as a "dinosaur... way past [his] sell-by date", who was talking "a load of balls".

But the right-on Guardian, oddly enough, was rather more sympathetic. "His comments have already been denounced in the Times as sexist but they will add to the clamour for brained-up programming on BBC1," a story on the Media Guardian website noted, describing Milne as "an influential figure" and "a lovely bloke".

And a lovely dad, too. His son Seumas Milne is comment editor of the Guardian.

ANOTHER week, another gratuitous plug for Ross Kemp, courtesy of the *Sun*'s ever-diligent showbiz desk.

Following Sara Nathan's ringing endorsement of his Sky documentary *Lethal Attraction: Why Americans Love Guns* (see last *Eye*), hacks Oliver Harvey and Caroline Iggulden have now joined the chorus of praise for their editor's husband.

In an article about the woes of *EastEnders*, the pair managed to work in the suggestion that Kemp's Grant Mitchell character be restored to the cast: "One of the best soap baddies of all time. His welcome return would certainly liven things up." It might also cheer up the Wade-Kemp household budget, which will be £1.5m lighter next year following ITV's decision not to renew its contract with the muscle-bound slaphead.

O·B·N

The whole nation will wish Tony Blair a safe operation and a speedy recovery as he enters hospital today for heart treatment.

The Prime Minister has been enduring huge stress for many months over Iraq and the approaching election...

...This week he has been on relentless duty 18 hours a day at the Labour conference.

And on top of these pressures, there is the country to run – plus a young family at home to whom he is a loving husband and father.

It is a crushing workload, and Mr Blair has only been able to endure it because he is an extraordinary man... Get well soon, Tony

The Sun *Submitted by Ben Kay*

£10 paid for entries put forward for the Order of the Brown Nose.

"Far too much mousse"

WHEN Richard Desmond "sold" most of his porn mags to Messrs Simon Robinson and Aroon Maharajh of Remnant Media, Des's sidekick Paul Ashford made a speech on the day of the handover assuring staff that things would continue exactly the same under the new owners and that everyone's job was safe.

No prizes for guessing what happened next. Within a few months nearly everybody has been sacked or has left in despair at the David Brent style management.

Suppliers' invoices regularly go unpaid for months on end. Robinson, who now runs the firm single-handedly since Aroon wisely jumped ship, is trying to save money anywhere he can, even to the extent of making the mags an inch or so smaller to save on paper cost.

Oh dear, oh dear. Is it time for the supposedly "hands-off" Dirty Des to bale out the sinking ship, before such much-loved national institutions as *Asian Babes* and *Big Ones* disappear beneath the waves forever?

***TIMES* social affairs correspondent Alexandra Frean delivered an impressive analysis of the latest government figures on childlessness on 1 October.**

Among her findings, lavishly illustrated with a brightly-coloured bar chart, was the discovery that in 95 percent of cases, single women who do not want babies... er... don't have babies.

Number crunching

2.5m ■ CDs sold in a week in UK

10m ■ CDs given away free with weekend papers in UK

HOT NEWS from the *Sunday Telegraph*'s political correspondent Melissa Kite: "Tony and Cherie Blair demanded that their children be given the same protection from the press as Princes William and Harry, according to the former director of the Press Complaints Commission."

Editor Dominic Lawson was so excited by the story he splashed it across the top of the front page on 3 October. All very interesting, but hardly a front-page scoop. The report had in fact been lifted straight from *The Blairs and Their Court*, by Francis Beckett and David Hencke, which had been prominently serialised a full six days earlier in the *Guardian*.

WHO exactly is Barrie "Barrington" Penrose, the former *Sunday Times* investigative journalist who has been telling people he is writing a book about the alleged botched toffs' coup in oil-rich Equatorial Guinea?

Penrose has appeared on the BBC's *Today* programme and *Newsnight* as an apparently objective expert on the affair. He has also been writing about it for the *Evening Standard* and others. But these outlets should perhaps have looked a little more closely at how it was Penrose came to be so well informed. For the author of *Rinkagate, the Rise and Fall of Jeremy Thorpe*, is at the centre of his own controversy – doubling up as helping hand for Henry Page of Penningtons law firm, which has been advising the government of Equatorial Guinea.

The conflict of interest between Penrose's two roles, effectively as dirt digger for the world's most ghastly government and independent writer, appears not to trouble Mr Page. The Penningtons man freely admits Penrose has been helping him out. And with some enthusiasm, it appears.

The well-connected author of an intelligence briefing about the alleged plot says Penrose called him up last month and demanded that he hand over the 30-page document. If he refused, Penrose said Page would add his name to the list of alleged plot masterminds and financiers being sued by Equatorial Guinea at the high court in London later this month.

Penrose and Page say they have exchanged information on an informal basis, and that Page has never paid Penrose. But Page has confirmed that he asked Penrose to try to get the set of documents, and to use the prospect of the author's inclusion in the civil action if he failed to release them as an inducement. For his part, Penrose gamely insists that despite doing such work for Mr Page, he is nevertheless an entirely independent voice.

Page does not appear directly to have used these threats himself to secure material that might be used as evidence. But he has offered to "help" several journalists if they were able to provide copies of a contract involving some of the alleged plotters. "If you scratch my back," he said, "I will scratch yours."

Page has also been the conduit for much of the British media of a series of seemingly incriminating documents, including confessions extracted from Simon Mann and Nick Du Toit, the two principal alleged mercenaries Page insists were at the centre of the plot. The statements were taken from two of Africa's most brutal prisons where accusations of torture and abuse are rife. No sensible court would entertain such material as reliable evidence for a moment. In addition to such briefing, he's also found time to help arrange visas for journalists looking to cover what passes for a trial in Equatorial Guinea.

Quite what the Law Society might make of Page's practices is not clear.

Alternative History

"It's time to put this behind us now and move on"

HACKWATCH

For Fox Sake

YOU MAY already know that the chief political correspondent of Rupert Murdoch's hysterically right-wing Fox News channel was in a spot of bother last week. But if you read only the Murdoch papers, you probably won't.

Here are the bald statistics. Number of words devoted by the *Sun* to attacking the BBC over the Hutton inquiry: approximately 11,000. Number of words devoted by the *Sun* – and all other News International titles – to the news that a senior Murdoch hack tried to sabotage John Kerry's campaign by fabricating effeminate quotes and attributing them to him: nil, zero, zip.

For the benefit of *Sun* and *Times* readers, here are a few other stories from recent months that may have escaped their attention…

April: For more than a year the American press has been banned from photographing the flag-draped coffins of dead US troops when they return from Iraq. Now, using the freedom of information act, a website obtains from the Pentagon more than 300 photos of coffins arriving at Dover air force base. They are, the *Independent*, says, "the photographs that President George Bush does not want the American public to see", and when they are reproduced by almost all US newspapers and TV networks they duly trigger further debate about whether the war is justified.

As the *Independent* also notes: "Only Rupert Murdoch's Fox News has declined to show the pictures or report any discussion about the White House's decision to prevent their publication." Although Fox News's curious self-censorship is reported elsewhere in the British press, the *Sun* and *Times* maintain a loyal silence.

May: The global-warming blockbuster *The Day After Tomorrow* is released in Britain, and several critics notice a shameless bit of product placement. "In this Fox movie, the meteorological meltdown has at any rate shown some corporate loyalty," Peter Bradshaw writes in the *Guardian*, "by destroying all TV transmitter masts except those owned by Fox News and (in our own country) Sky News, which give jabbering updates about this deplorable situation."

The *Daily Telegraph* is also glad to see "that Fox News will be first on the front lines when this kind of planetary catastrophe arises, so long as Rupert Murdoch happens to be bankrolling it". The film critics of the *Sun* and the *Times*, however, maintain a loyal silence.

June: Fox News is censured by Ofcom, the British media regulator, for its coverage of the Hutton inquiry. According to a Fox report (available to British satellite viewers) Hutton had convicted the BBC of "frothing-at-the-mouth anti-Americanism" and concluded that the corporation "felt entitled to lie and, when caught lying, felt entitled to defend its lying reporters and executives". The rebuke gets 563 words in the *Guardian*, 536 words in the *Economist* and, er, 52 words (precisely two sentences) in the *Times*, which adds inverted commas ("Fox… had 'breached' Ofcom's code") as if there were some doubt about the ruling. Naturally there is no space for the *Times* to quote Ofcom's verdict that Fox News was "failing to show respect for the truth". Showing admirable respect for its proprietor, the *Sun* maintains a loyal silence.

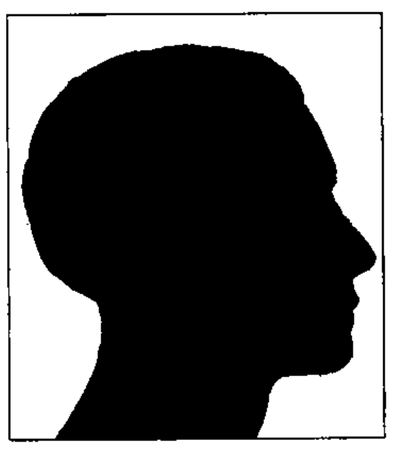
July: Fox News's coverage of the Democratic National Convention in Boston is "eccentric, to say the least", the *Independent* reports. "While every other cable news outlet was providing intensive coverage and analysis of the speeches, Fox spent much of its time scooping up trivial crime stories from around the country. For the first two days, it showed barely any live coverage of the speeches. Sean Hannity and Bill O'Reilly [Fox presenters] moved their operations to Boston's Fleet Centre for the duration, but used the time either to engineer confrontations… or else to talk to the few Republicans present and agree that the spectacle was a television masquerade behind which lurked an extremist left-wing agenda." After a deluge of complaints, in the last two days of the convention Fox airs rather more speeches. But readers of the *Sun* and *Times* are kept in happy ignorance of this kerfuffle, since their newspapers maintain a loyal silence.

August: The best-selling DVD in America is *Outfoxed: Rupert Murdoch's War on Journalism*, a low-budget documentary which has sold 100,000 copies in two weeks purely through word-of-mouth. British newspapers report at length on the extraordinary success and reverberating influence of the film, which sets out to show that although Fox's slogan is "Fair and Balanced" its news reporting is relentlessly pro-Republican. The *Sun* and *Times* loyally decline to mention it at all. Yet the *Times* does find space for two other Fox stories this month. On 7 August, TV presenter Fiona Phillips reveals in an interview that she and her husband "often watch America's Fox News Network, because it's highly entertaining as well as informative". Five days later, the business section reports that Fox News, "the most popular news channel in America", increased its earnings by 40 percent last year.

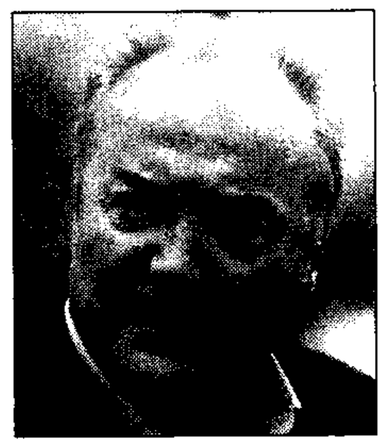
September: While the Republican convention in New York gets exhaustive and ecstatic live coverage from Fox News, a 1,000-strong crowd gathers outside the channel's Manhattan studios to protest at its right-wing slant. (One placard reads: "Republicans are really stupid. They watch Fox News and believe it.") The demonstration is reported in several British papers, but not in any owned by the Dirty Digger. The Murdoch press is too busy gloating over the embarrassment of CBS and its anchorman Dan Rather, who have apologised for broadcasting a story about George W. Bush based on forged documents. A *Times* editorial says that Rather's position is "unsustainable"; the *Sunday Times* adds that old networks such as CBS look increasingly like "dinosaurs" in an age when "the spread of 24-hour cable and satellite news channels has transformed the way Americans hear the news". Rupert Murdoch claims that if Fox had made the mistake rather than CBS, "we would have been crucified".

October: Fox News's chief political correspondent, Carl Cameron, reports that John Kerry has described himself as a "metrosexual" who appeals to women voters because "I do manicures". On learning that Cameron fabricated the quotes, a Fox spokesman attributes them to "fatigue and bad judgement, rather than malice". He adds that "Carl Cameron made a stupid mistake and he has been reprimanded for his lapse in judgement", though he refuses to say what punishment – if any – will be imposed. Crucifixion, perhaps? At least it would show that for once in his life the Dirty Digger was telling the truth.

Non-lookalike



British citizen



Galloway

I couldn't help noticing the astonishing lack of similarity between this "British citizen" accused by the Daily Telegraph *last week of accepting bribes from Saddam Hussein, and George Galloway MP, currently suing the* Daily Telegraph *for accusing him last year of accepting bribes from Saddam Hussein. Are they, as every other paper in Fleet Street seems to believe, related?*

Yours sincerely,
ENA B. MOORE-CAREFUL, Baghdad.

SO WHO saved the day for the Dear Leader at the Labour party conference in Brighton and enabled him to pronounce boldly by the end of it that he would serve "another full term"? Why it was the block vote of the big trade unions of course!

While whole armies of journos allowed themselves to be led on a wild goose chase, examining every permutation of the tempestuous Blair/Brown relationship, the big unions – Amicus, Unison, the GMB and the TGWU – were busy cooking up a deal to save the prime minister's neck over Iraq. It was done in the hope that he will stick by the union-friendly policies that were thrashed out behind close doors with union chiefs at Labour's national policy forum in Warwick in July. Some hope!

So how did the brothers, who spend so much of their time fulminating against the evils of Blairism and advocating Gordon Brown as leader (while gracing anti-war platforms up and down the country), carry out their miserable deed?

At the beginning of conference week a handful of local constituency parties had tabled resolutions demanding "an early date for a phased withdrawal of British troops from Iraq". Since these were more or less the same words passed by the big unions at the TUC a few weeks earlier, it seemed entirely plausible that the unions would support their own policy.

But wait. Labour chiefs had managed to exile the "debate" on Iraq to a graveyard slot on Thursday when they knew political hacks would be running around getting excited about the Hartlepool by-election. In addition, foreign secretary Jack Straw had been having "words" with the young first-time delegate from east London who had had the temerity to want to move the "troop withdrawal motion". At one stage the delegate was invited to "attend a meeting to discuss Iraq", only to find himself hauled into a private room where a pair of councillors from his neck of the woods imparted the friendly advice that his "career in politics would be over" unless he recanted.

At the same time the big four unions were being warned that their "Warwick agreement" might be jeopardised if they didn't play ball over Iraq; and a friendly official from the Iraqi Federation of Trade Unions was miraculously found to visit the union delegations and tell them what a disaster it would be if the government were, in line with TUC thinking, forced to change its policy.

Key to "helping" the brothers and sisters perform their almighty U- turn was the legendary Jack Dromey, of Grunwick picket line fame and husband of Harriet Harman. Dromey is now deputy general-secretary of the TGWU and a member of Labour's NEC. The unions then performed their perfect somersault, signing up instead to a statement on Iraq drawn up by Straw, which simply restated government policy: ie no troop withdrawals unless asked for by the Iraqi "government".

PS: Whatever happened to the representative from Mole Valley Labour party who refused to give the Dear Leader a standing ovation at the end of his conference speech, and instead held up a piece of paper that boldly stated "I'm sitting for peace"? Wrestled from his chair by stewards he was carted off to an ante-room and held for six hours as Inspector Knacker conducted "security checks" on him.

MANY of the Labour faithful listening to chancellor Gordon Brown's emotional conference speech will have concluded that the National Health Service would be safe in his hands.

Indeed, as he extolled the virtues of a service and staff "whose dedication, commitment and humanity show that there are values far beyond those of contracts, markets and exchange", the more misty-eyed may even have thought he was threatening the ascendancy of the private finance initiative (PFI) in the NHS.

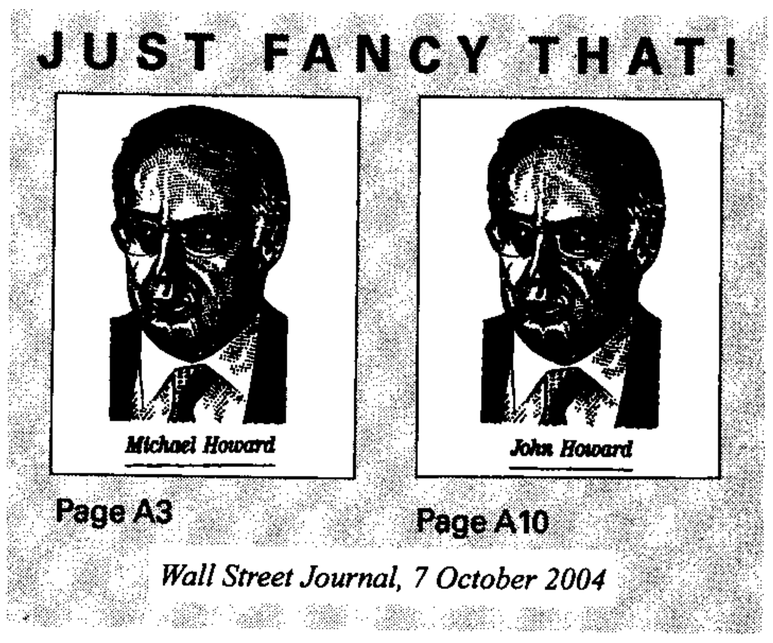
But it meant no such thing. The day before Brown stood up in Brighton, the head of his PFI unit in the treasury, Geoffrey Spence, was speaking to a very different audience… and giving a very different message.

Spence addressed a gathering of PFI industry leaders at the Royal Lancaster Hotel in London on subjects including "developing a liquid secondary market in PPP investments [aka schools and hospitals]". His main point was to reassure the suits that there is no prospect of the government seeking to recoup profits they make on the sale of PFI projects – which are hugely valuable because they promise a long-term flow of guaranteed public money for up to 30 years.

In other words there must be no impediment, in the treasury's view, to the all-important market in schools and hospitals, even though this will mean many of them end up in different – and unaccountable – hands every few years as the demands of shareholders take priority over those of the public.

PS: As reported in *Eye 1097*, Brown has already given the PFI secondary market a major shot in the arm. In 2002 he exempted the sale of companies, such as those running PFIs from capital gains tax, allowing the "market" to get its windfall profits tax-free.

PPS: Geoffrey Spence, who was on secondment from big PFI financier Deutsche Bank, is leaving the treasury shortly to join HSBC, a bank looking to increase its PFI work. His position as chief adviser to Brown on PFIs will be taken by David Abadie, a partner in accountancy firm PricewaterhouseCoopers, the largest PFI adviser of all (£30bn worth of projects and counting).



PRIZE for most inappropriate sponsorship at the Labour party conference in Brighton went to education minister Stephen Twigg.

Twigg agreed to speak on "Investing in young people: Investing in our future" on a platform paid for by **Nestlé**. Heavily criticised for promoting powdered baby milk in the developing world, the company is now being carpeted in the developed world for flogging sweets and cereals stuffed full of sugar and salt. Not the sort of investment in young people Twigg was thinking of, presumably. Runners-up include:

● **Ed Balls**, former adviser to Gordon Brown and a future MP, who spoke on a platform paid for by Provident Financial, a specialist in lending to the poor. The company has been slammed (by some Labour MPs) for its exorbitant interest rates for doorstop loans and credit cards with APRs from 56 percent to 95 percent.

● **David Blunkett**, Home Secretary, who was booked by the Smith Institute courtesy of Norwich Union to speak on "Communities and Social Exclusion". In the same week the Norwich enraged the Amicus union by announcing that it was "offshoring" 7,000 jobs to call centres abroad.

● **Baroness Hollis**, the pensions minister, was booked by Standard Life to speak alongside its marketing director, Simon Douglas. The Labour head of the treasury select committee, John McFall, recently singled out Standard Life for paying big rises to its directors while slashing pay outs on pensions and investments.

● **Elliot Morley**, environment minister, who addressed a meeting on "who pays for pollution", sponsored by Wessex Water. Two weeks previously the Environment Agency had fined Wessex £7,800 for pouring diesel into the River Avon.

Number crunching

11 ■ Number of words which Michael Howard thinks will persuade people to vote for him

11 ■ Percentage of voters who think Michael Howard is an effective leader

DAVID "Two Brains" Willetts, shadow work and pensions secretary, has come up with a startling "new" idea: that the Tories should promise to restore the basic state pension which "new" Labour has allowed to wither since 1997.

Since it was his own party that abolished the link between pensions and earnings in the first place, credit for the volte-face must surely go to the CBI, whose members would much rather the state paid for senior citizens rather than them.

Since pensioners are more likely to vote than any other group – and since there are lot more of them these days – Willetts' vote-winning policy shift has created a little local difficulty for Tony Blair.

Up to now the Dear Leader has been obliged to go along with his brooding chancellor's bewildering array of pension policies, partly because, in common with everyone else, he didn't understand them, and also because Gordon Brown steadfastly refused to listen to anyone else as he was busy bringing back means-testing.

The Dear Leader now wants to increase the basic state pension, which puts him on yet another collision with his neighbour. Three years ago Blair was obliged to use emissaries to try to persuade Brown that his paltry pension increase would infuriate senior citizens – but he went ahead with it anyway. So if Brown refuses to budge this time, the Dear Leader may have no option but to sack him after the next election.

THE Conservative party has taken "rapid response" very literally indeed.

Political journalists trying to listen to home secretary David Blunkett's recent Labour party conference speech to see if he had anything new to say or whether he was (as usual) dressing up old initiatives in new clothing, were constantly interrupted by text messages on their mobile phones from Blunkett's Tory shadow, David Davis.

They contained such helpful observations as: "We welcome Labour's adoption of Conservative policy on embarkation controls. Better late than never." Or "to combat anti-social behaviour you need a proper police presence. We will create 40,000 extra police officers. They won't." To make matters worse, each message was sent several times. The result? Hacks had to switch off Davis's rapid response altogether.

"Emily?... Hello, it's Joan. Hi...we were trying to remember, is your Stan still alive?"

BATH MP Don Foster is, according to the chairman of his constituency Lib Dem party, stepping down before the next election. This may come as a surprise to Foster, the Lib Dems' media, culture and sport spokesman, and to Lib Dem HQ, which tells the *Eye*: "Our candidate in Bath at the next election is the current MP, Don Foster."

Foster's loyal constituency chairman Tim Bullamore, Bath councillor and obituary writer at the *Times*, has been telling fellow hacks that Foster is finished and that he, Bullamore, is Westminster-bound. He even asked one if she has any contacts at the *Eye* "who could put in a nice piece about me".

Always happy to oblige!

Tim Bullamore is noted for his sound judgement. "If these malcontents were allowed to have their way," he said of protesters against Bath's millennium Spa project (*Eyes passim*), "there would never be any progress. The time has come for them to accept that they have failed and that the Spa project will go ahead and will be a success for the city of Bath." A couple of years down the line the Spa has been such a success it is already three years late and looks set to cost £40m instead of £16m. The council has given up on setting an opening date.

SINCE the death of Eurotunnel supremo Sir Alastair Morton last month, many former colleagues have been swapping stories about his famous bluntness. As a sample of his style, one has sent the Eye a letter written in 1994 to Neil Hamilton MP.

Hamilton had complained on behalf of a man called Halkett, a businessman in his constituency who had lost out to a French company in a bid to provide equipment to Eurotunnel. The suggestion was that Eurotunnel deliberately rigged its procurement to favour the French, but Morton was having none of it.

"The simple answer is Bullshit," he replied, disclosing that even while the businessman was grumbling to Neil Hamilton he had sent an arslikhan letter to Eurotunnel thanking them for their "constructive approach".

"I would like to suggest to you," Sir Alastair wrote to Neil Hamilton, "that Mr Halkett should not try to wank his MP with his left hand while pursuing new business in a normal fashion with his right."

Warballs

● "Here's a fact that escaped the 9/11 commission: on the afternoon of the attacks 42 women called the New York Yves Saint Laurent store to order the label's peasant blouse, that fall's must-have fashion item. What that says about our culture's needs and wants is probably too chilling to contemplate – so don't; just continue to feast your eyes as you turn the pages of *Tom Ford*, a luscious coffee-table book out from Rizzoli this month." — **Vanity Fair**.

EDUCASHUN

HEADTEACHERS being inspected by Ofsted inspector Geoff Jepson might like to know how the former headteacher of St Martin's special school in Derby fared when his own school management skills and handling of staff morale were scrutinised.

Mr Jepson left St Martin's after all his teachers (barring two who had just joined the school) wrote to the local authority in October 2001 complaining that they had no confidence in their head's "ability to manage the school in the best interests of either staff or pupils".

Although investigations into the teachers' allegations were never completed, not long after the complaint Mr Jepson left his post under an agreement with the local education authority. An Ofsted inspection last year picked up on the problems, however, noting: "Since the last inspection [in 1997] the school has experienced a period of weak leadership and poor management which resulted in a loss of morale and high staff absence putting standards at risk."

So why is Mr Jepson now an inspector?

IN THE COURTS

WHEN Ruth Dudley Edwards reviewed Channel Four's film *Bloody Sunday* in the *Daily Mail* on 8 January 2002, she did not hold back on her criticism. It was, she opined, a "viciously anti-British film" and "a piece of IRA propaganda" and advised viewers to "forget this film and think instead of the Omagh families who are suing the Real IRA and five individuals for murdering their loved ones."

Co-producer Don Mullan took her advice obviously and went on to write the screenplay for *Omagh*, shown on Channel Four earlier this year. But he also issued a writ for libel – despite the fact that he was not actually named in Dudley Edwards' review, which only referred to "a team of luvvies" as being behind the film.

Sadly for Mullan, at the end of last month the high court in Belfast threw out his action, because his writ had not been presented to the court until May 2003 – four months after the time limit of a year had expired. He now faces a massive legal bill. Perhaps he should write to Simon Mann, who made his acting debut in *Bloody Sunday* as a British officer, in his cell in Zimbabwe, and see if he knows any millionaires who could help out?

Down On The Fish Farm

THERE was great excitement in the Scottish press when the list of gifts received by Scottish ministers was revealed at the beginning of the month. They have scooped some 785 "tokens of appreciation" over the past five years; including freebies to sporting events, several gallons of whisky and assorted glassware, ties and cufflinks.

Leading the pack with 120 offerings is first minister Jack McConnell, who counted among his presents a set of gold cufflinks in the shape of salmon. Valued at £100 they were presented to him by his friends in Scotland's biggest fish farm company, the foreign-owned multinational Marine Harvest. Noticeable by its absence from the first minister's list, however, was the side of wild Alaskan smoked salmon (value £25) that was delivered to Mr McConnell at his official residence, Bute House, in Charlotte Square, Edinburgh, on 14 December 2002 by an environmental group concerned about the impact fish farm disease and pollution was having on Scotland's wild salmonids.

There is no doubt the minister received the gift because he later told one of the environmentalists it was "delicious" and added: "You'll never guess who was with me at the time: my brother, he works for Marine Harvest!"

'Old Trout'

Down On The Farm

REMEMBER the great "beef war" of the late 1990s, when we discovered that our EU partners had the power to shut their borders to beef and beef products from Britain and prohibit us from selling them anywhere in the world?

Thanks to the EU ban, we weren't even allowed to export glue to India or wine gums to the Falklands. Now it could all be about to happen again, except this time the cause of the "war" will be milk and dairy products, from cheese to chocolate bars.

This complex story began in July, when Russia announced that it would no longer import milk and milk products unless they came from herds certified as TB-free. No particular worries there for Britain since, unlike Germany and Poland, our dairy exports to Russia are tiny. But the next step came in September when Russia announced that it would no longer import animals or animal products on the basis of bilateral agreements with individual EU member states. It would in future treat the EU as a single country, all agreements having to be negotiated through Brussels. And herein lies the problem.

TB is ripping through Britain's cattle herds at record levels. But there is no bar on selling milk from TB-infected herds, so long as it is pasteurised. It is then "bulked up" with milk from TB-free farms, so no one can tell the difference.

Since under "single market" rules there is then no bar on selling that milk or products made from it anywhere in the EU, the Russians have no guarantee that, if they import those products, they may not contain milk from herds which have not been certified TB-free. So, as from 1 January, new rules lay down that all imports from the EU must be prohibited, hurting the Poles and Germans badly.

Their only defence is to ask Big Brother in Brussels to insist that, unless Britain bans the sale of milk from TB-affected farms, it will have to prohibit any further exports from Britain, not only into the rest of the "single market" but anywhere. The natural desire of the Poles and the Germans to continue their lucrative trade with Russia thus leaves Britain with the awkward choice that it must either forbid any sales of milk from infected herds (at huge cost to the taxpayers) or face a total export ban (at huge cost to the farmers and the wider economy).

A half-way house would be to allow milk from infected herds still to be sold on the home market, but separated from the rest and at a much lower price. But this would immediately provoke an outcry from those asking why, if the milk is viewed as dangerous by other countries, British consumers are still allowed to drink it.

It is not yet clear how Defra will jump. All that is certain is that this was exactly the kind of mess it was going to land in when it failed to take decisive action against the chief suspect of the epidemic – TB-infected badgers. But what a treat to land on the desk of the EU's new trade commissioner, Peter Mandelson, one of whose first tasks could be to impose a ban on British exports worth hundreds of millions of pounds a year.

'Muckspreader'

Number crunchings

£48m ■ Grant given to UK Atomic Energy Authority to seek "safe alternative to conventional nuclear energy" through fusion research

£48bn ■ Cost of decommissioning former nuclear power stations

TV

The British Isles – A Natural History (BBC1)

THIRTY years ago BBC schedules were constructed according to a system called "hammocking". The idea was that, if you placed a serious arts or news show between a sitcom and a movie, viewers attracted by the populist red-meat on both sides would tolerate the liberal lentil filling in the middle.

With multi-channel viewing and self-scheduling, this theory no longer holds; and so the BBC is trying a rival approach in which a host from a popular genre is given a show in a low-ratings area.

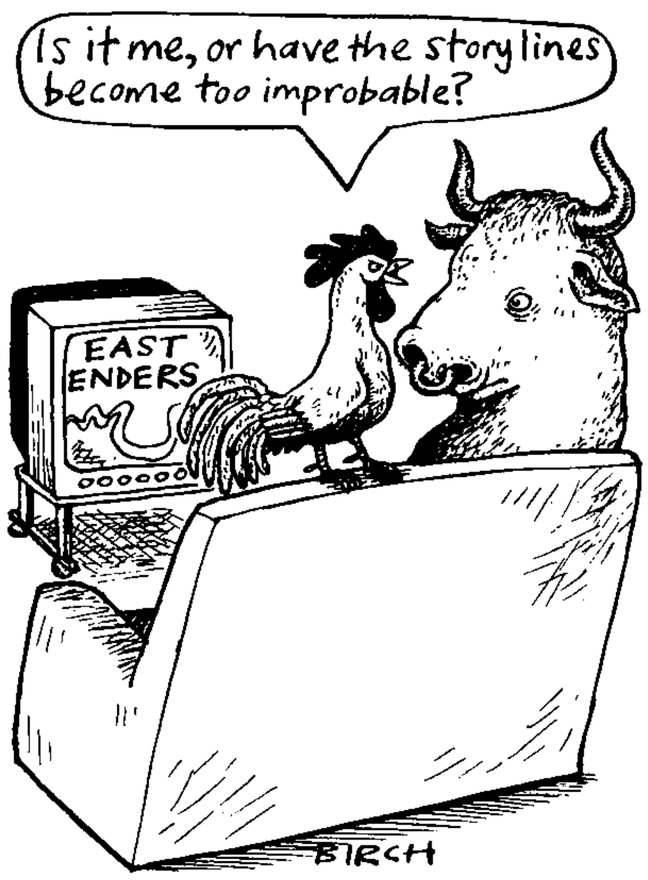
British Isles: A Natural History is the ultimate example of the genre. Alan Titchmarsh, whose gardening shows made him a bit of a favourite for middle-aged ladies, has now improbably been annointed as heir to Sir David Attenborough who, while not an academic expert on birds and animals, has a considerable data-base accumulated over decades. Also, while an enthusiast, Sir David is neither sentimental about living things nor an egotist about himself.

In contrast, Titchmarsh's main knowledge of British landscape seems to be that he has lived and walked on it a bit: in both of the first two programmes he made an almost identical reference to the "Yorkshire grit-stone" of his boyhood.

Perhaps aware of the shakiness of the host's grasp on the subject, the production turns the presenter into the subject. Viewers might have hoped that an Action Man sequence in the first episode – in which Partridge, sorry, Titchmarsh used five different forms of transport in succession – was just show-offery for the opener. But programme two began with Alan in a Harrier jump-jet, then a helicopter and finally on skis within a few minutes.

While it's possible that some women viewers simply enjoy seeing Titchmarsh in all these outfits so that they can imagine taking them off, for most of the audience the success of a presenter-led series will depend on the host's descriptive abilities. But, here, the commentary wanders between the inane – "Wow! Isn't that great?" – and the useless: "I wish I could describe what this looks like."

But, though abysmal as an



exercise in natural history, the series is interesting – and even unique – in terms of the history of television. Because of the medium's long production times, it takes two to three years for a director-general to have serious influence over the schedules. This means that the BBC only really belongs to the DG in the second half of their incumbency.

But, as a result of Hutton and Blair, Dyke was substituted at half-time, which means that his influence is most apparent on screen at the exact moment that he has disappeared from the office.

The British Isles – A Natural History is pure Dyke TV: a populist presenter tackling a subject for which he has no obvious qualification and favouring attempted jokes and visual gags over educational content. Such an unrigorous programme would have been unimaginable in Birt's TV and is equally unlikely in Mark Thompson's. Indeed, the shift in the tone of BBC has recently been so severe that, with Thompson appointing Mark Damazer to run Radio 4, the BBC is now largely in the hands of men who could conduct their morning meetings in Latin if they wished.

But, by a quirk of political history, these highbrows now find themselves presiding over the launch of possibly the most stupid major documentary series the BBC has ever screened. Their response has been largely to ignore it.

In the past, television critics or BBC presenters and programmes who attacked a landmark series would receive a rapid corporate response encouraging them to understand the positive points of the project. With *The British Isles – A Natural History*, that hasn't happened. In fact, the attitude towards the Titchmarsh series within the BBC is most reminiscent of the way that Iraqis responded to statues of Saddam when he was gone.

In Dyke's recent book and television documentary, there's a tangible anger that his work at the BBC was left unfinished. But even more depressing for him is the rapid redundancy of the stuff he did get done. All director-generals have to watch as the next resident changes the fixtures and fittings in the house they've lovingly built. Dyke, though, never got to enjoy his renovations.

And watching Titchmarsh floundering, we think, as so often happened in the host's show *Ground Force*: How could anyone have thought that was a good idea?

'Remote Controller'

MEDIA NEWS

NEWS that BSkyB has dismissed its commercial director Martin Goswami for drunkenly heckling Greg Dyke at an industry dinner brings back memories of an incident 12 years ago.

In June 1992 Murdoch sacked the president of Fox TV, Stephen Chao, for bringing a male stripper on to the stage at a News Corp leadership seminar to illustrate a point about censorship. "One thing this company has to stand for is that there are limits," said the man who brought Page 3 to the UK.

Like the hapless Chao, Mr Goswami must be wondering what he did to offend Murdoch. After all, a few heckles are nothing compared with the kicking that the Murdoch press has given Dyke over the past year.

The answer, inevitably, has nothing to do with moral "limits". At the Aspen event 12 years ago, Murdoch's main guests were the then US defence secretary Dick Cheney and his wife Lynne. What prompted the Digger's fury was not the stripper but the fear of offending an important political contact.

So it is with Martin Goswami. At the dinner where he became tired and emotional, Sky had invited as its guest-of-honour none other than Tessa Jowell, the minister responsible for broadcasting. As the Digger has proved once again, anyone who jeopardises his relations with politicians can expect instant execution.

SKY NEWS showed a rare interest in ancient tongues when it ran a recent feature called "Inside Syria", which focused on communities in the Middle East preserving Aramaic as a spoken language.

The mystery as to where this new-found interest in linguistics came from was soon cleared up when the reporter noted that Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ* was scripted in Aramaic – and helpfully illustrated the point with clips from the movie. Of course, the fact that the film has just been released on DVD and was made by Twentieth Century Fox, a company owned by a certain R. Murdoch, was entirely coincidental.

I-SKY

"Football is my only interest. I watch all the games I can on TV. On Sundays, I'll watch three or four. If I'm not playing myself, it's Chris Kamara's show on Sky, *Goals On Sunday*, then Premiership Plus, and then the main TV game. Then, on Mondays, Sky do a reprise of all the goals and maybe a match, too. If I'm not watching that, I'm on skysports.com."

— Jermaine Defoe, the *Times*.

THREE years ago staff at the BBC's religion department were alarmed at the appointment of an agnostic, Alan Bookbinder, to head their department.

Bookbinder has now, however, ascended to a higher place (a seven-month attachment on the BBC's "leadership programme" at Ashridge management school) and left them in the capable hands of acting head of religion Saul Nasse, formerly the editor of *Tomorrow's World*, and a published expert on, er, *Doctor Who*.

His knowledge of spiritual issues appears slightly less extensive, however, judging by a pleading email which he sent round to his colleagues after his appointment last month: "If there are any religion/ethics books that you think it would be good for me to read, I'd love your suggestions. I can't promise to read them all instantly, but I will have some train journeys I can put to a useful purpose!"

BBC Technology, flogged to Siemens Business Services in a £2bn deal, is about to enter a "100-day transition period" during which "new ways of working", ie redundancies, will be discussed.

BBC staff who now work for Siemens are still trying to work out why they have been sold. After all, the deal only saves the BBC £30m over 10 years and the need for "a major global technology provider" like Siemens seems slight since the BBC already handles almost all its production work using kit from Microsoft and Apple Mac.

But the sale impressed the department for culture, media and sport, which is deciding whether or not to renew the BBC's charter, so that's why it went ahead.

DUMB BRITAIN

The Weakest Link, BBC2

Anne Robinson: What part of the human body is closest to the floor when we are walking?

Contestant: The head.

AR: Which Tory MP twice stood unsuccessfully for the leadership of the Conservative Party, against William Hague and Iain Duncan Smith?

Contestant *(after much thought)*: Ken Livingstone.

24-Hour Challenge, BBC Radio York

Jonathon Cowap: If someone is described as hirsute, what are they?

Contestant: Erm.

Cowap: Here's a clue. Most men are, and most women would like us to think they are not.

Contestant *(after long pause)*: Is it gay, Jonathon?

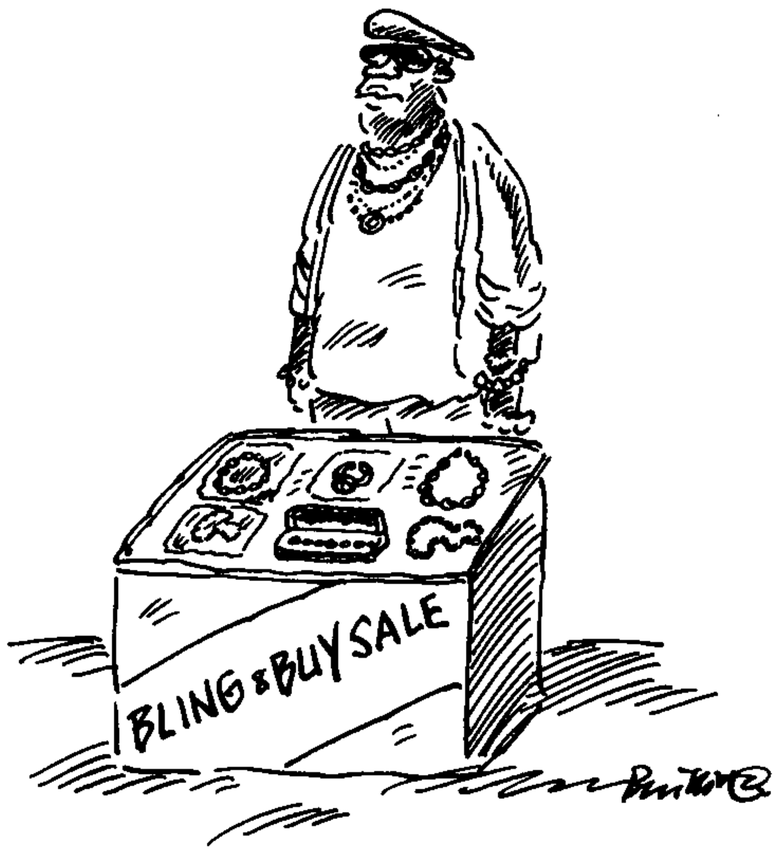
COMPUTER WORLD

AS EMAIL spam filters strive to cope with sneaky spellings such as pr0n and vi4gra, it's not just Scunthorpe that's losing mail these days.

At the Horniman Museum in south London, around a fifth of its mail is currently being bounced as servers take affront at receiving email from an apparently "horny man". Schools are also struggling to log on to the museum's website for educational material.

The museum itself has little "adult" content; although it did recently host a 4,000-year-old sculpture of a naked, winged woman which may have been a brothel sign in ancient Baghdad.

Meanwhile in Scotland campaigners seeking funding for a lesbian sexual health promotion project were nonplussed when emails to the health education board for Scotland (HEBS) kept bouncing back – until they tried taking the word "lesbian" out of the message.



WORLD OF HYPE

WHO said the art of spin is dead?

On the same day that Richard Branson's press office announced plans to send tourists heavenwards aboard Virgin Galactic spacecraft, spokesmen also slipped out the less exciting news that on their first day of service, only 58 of Virgin's 150 new tilting choo-choo trains managed to arrive on schedule.

THE NEOPHILIACS

"Knitting is the new clubbing." – Scott Mills, Radio 1.

"It's Thursday this morning, which we all know is the new Friday." – Scott Mills, Radio 1.

"Slobbishness is the new intimacy." – Amanda Platell, *Evening Standard*.

"Knightsbridge blonde is still the new grey." – Emma Soames, *Evening Standard*.

"We used to say that 50 was the new 40, but now I wonder if it's not the new 32 and a half." – Emma Soames, *Evening Standard*.

"Actually, cod-liver oil is the new HRT." – Emma Soames, *Evening Standard*.

"40 is the new 21." – John Scott, *This Morning*, ITV.

"Modesty is the new bombast." – Anne McElvoy, *Evening Standard*.

"Is Alan Titchmarsh the new David Attenborough?" – Kirsty Lang, *Front Row*, Radio 4.

"Is politics the new black?" – Andrew Neil, *This Week*.

"Get into green. It's the new black and it's everywhere," – BBC News online

AD NAUSEAM

WHAT is the government going to do about the growing nuisance of junk mail? Answer: send some itself.

At the Labour party conference a fortnight ago, Matt Barker, Labour's general-secretary, said: "Our strategy is now focused on the individualised, personalised, targeted campaign." In the forthcoming election, he said, Labour will cut back on traditional forms of advertising – posters and television – and instead concentrate on direct mail, which will "communicate with people on a one-to-one basis." He neglected to mention that junk mail is also far cheaper. Just last week Labour sent one million letters to voters in key marginals.

At his conference a week later, Michael Howard noted that Labour was "too big, too meddlesome and getting in the way." He then emphasised the difference between his party and Tony Blair's by promising to send out yet more junk mail, in the form of 11 million letters outlining the Tories' election pledges that should be hitting post boxes soon. Suddenly, those unwanted credit card applications seem endlessly readable.

SPEAKING of Tories, hands up who could spot the hand of Saatchi at work in Bournemouth?

An expensive – though fundamentally unchanged – new logo, a pitch tape introducing prospective "clients" to all the leading lights of the team, a new typeface that bears a startling resemblance to that used by an agency called M&C Saatchi… All they need now, Saatchi will be telling them, is that big idea.

PS: Immediate Sales, the Tories' new advertising agency, is a subsidiary of M&C Saatchi.

ONE of the Food Standards Agency's recent recommendations to combat child obesity was that celebrity promotions of junk food should end by 2006. This would be a blow to McDonald's whose current ad campaign relies on star names including Justin Timberlake and the Williams sisters.

So it has decided to act fast and quickly signed up another celebrity trio, the girl group Destiny's Child, for a new campaign. The question is, will lead singer Beyonce Knowles be shown actually eating any of the food?

This time last year she told *Blender* magazine: "I am a natural fat person, just dying to get out. I go through agonies to keep my stomach as flat as possible – though it is never flat enough for me." She added that her lunch consisted of six slices of tomato and four slices of cucumber. In which case wouldn't the sight of Beyonce munching contentedly on a Big Mac constitute misleading advertising?

SUPERMODELS

KERBER

AGENCY DOCTOR
I'M PLEASED TO TELL YOU TO EXPECT THE PITTER-PATTER OF TINY FEET!
...I'VE AMPUTATED THREE OF YOUR TOES.....
...YOU CAN NOW FIT INTO THESE SIZE 1's !!!
OH GOODY !!!

DOING THE ROUNDS

SO, after just seven years in office, "new" Labour has reached the same conclusion as the Tories: patients would be best served if budgets and commissioning power were given to GP practices.

This "new" model of practice-led commissioning (or PLC) was due to be universally introduced from next April. But a week after health minister John "Mini Milburn" Hutton announced it, the department of health has decided it should be road-tested first to make sure it doesn't push change "too far, too fast" (ie back to 1997).

The biggest losers stand to be primary care trusts (PCTs). They've only just been given 75 percent of the NHS budget and now stand to lose it again. As M.D. predicted long ago, PCTs were only ever an interim stage in a repeating cycle: they will eventually all merge to become the same as the district health authorities of old, with strategic health authorities taking the place of regional ones.

There are important differences between fundholding and PLC, however. In the old system, GPs were able to keep all their profits to reinvest in patient care. If they owned their own practices and used the money to improve them, they also made a sizeable personal capital gain on retirement. Under PLC, GPs can only reinvest half the profits with the other half going to the PCT. And unlike fundholding, all practices will have the chance to become PLC at the same time: PCTs have very few reasons to turn them down.

As under the Tories, new initiatives can't be seen to fail, and so PLC practices will be bailed out by the PCT if they overspend. However, if they can't balance the books over three years, they'll have the budget taken away. And unlike the old system of block contracts, commissioning will now depend largely on patient choice. Patients choose where they want to go and the money follows them under a fixed tariff system, something the Tories never managed to achieve.

The ingenuity of this system is that if a local hospital can't attract the business, it will have to close in part or whole. This isn't because of nasty politicians, but because the punters want to go elsewhere instead. So the Milburn mantra of "Shifting the Balance of Power" becomes "Shifting the Blame on to Patients". Or as Tony Blair told the Labour conference: "The NHS will be safe in the patient's hands."

Very clever, but will it work? A four-year pilot of PLC in north Bradford has achieved impressive results, with more involvement of staff and patients and better use of resources locally. Other GP practices have bought up cottage hospitals and are running routine surgery and a whole range of outpatient services much closer to patients' homes. But not all GPs are as interested and adept at commissioning. PLC will undoubtedly create inequalities, where patients of GPs who go for it and succeed get better care than those who don't. New Labour will have to ditch its mantra of equality and equity.

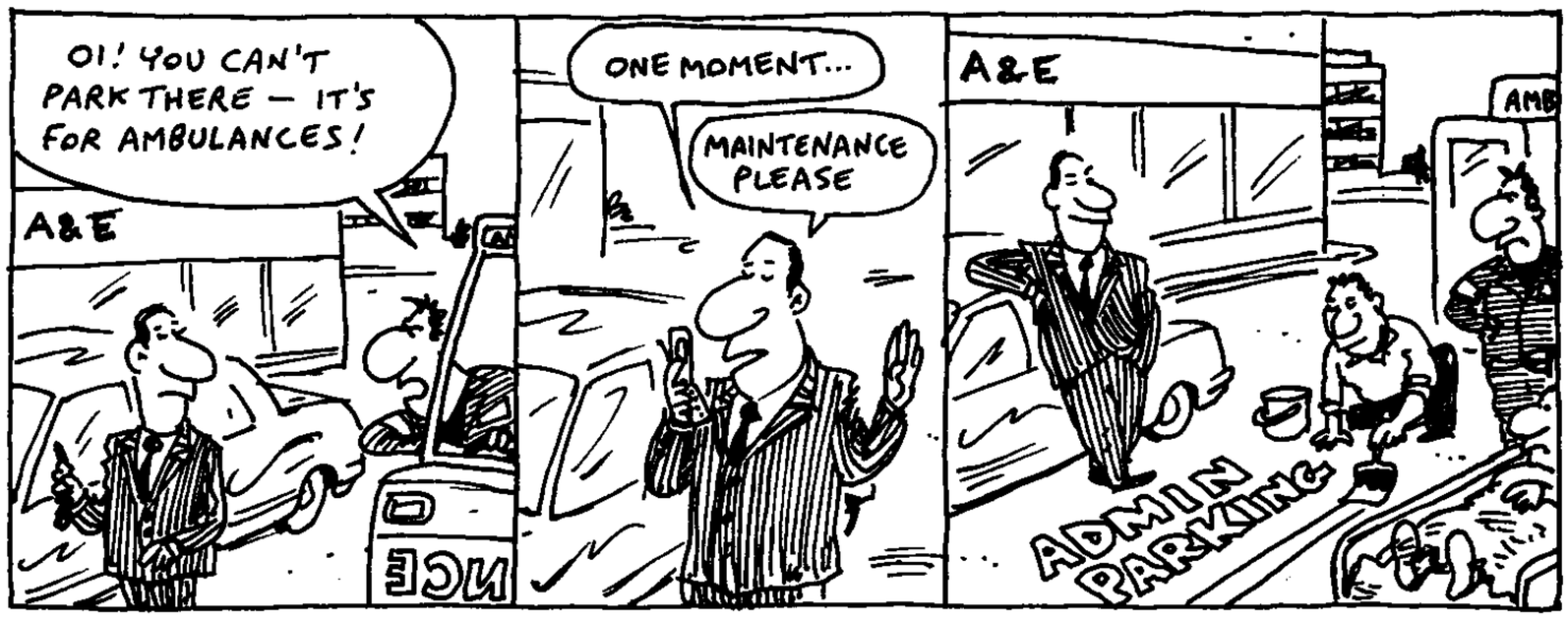
The demise of the district general hospital (DGH) will be accelerated by the rolling out of NHS and private treatment centres across the UK, which cherry pick the most common operations. They bring waiting times down, but hospitals which lose their lucrative surgery will have to up their prices for the emergency and critical care and many will have to merge.

This devolution of 90 percent of NHS service and centralisation of the really complex stuff was bottled by the Tories but Labour claim to be tougher, letting patients and the market decide. Or they did until the Hartlepool by-election when a desperate John Reid promised that the local hospital would not close "as long as I am secretary of state". A poll of NHS managers found that 89 percent wished he'd kept his mouth shut.

M.D.

off your trolley

REEVE & WAY



SIGNAL FAILURES

Whose train is it anyway?

STAGECOACH and Virgin Trains (half-owned by Stagecoach) are determined to convince the public that new trains are a result of their own largesse.

In June 2000 Virgin told Eye readers (1005) that "Virgin is investing over £2.8bn in new trains". In fact the trains were actually bought by banks for under £1bn and were temporarily leased to Virgin. Most of Virgin's claimed investment was future maintenance charges and Virgin has been repeating a similar lie ever since.

In 2002 Stagecoach's South West Trains was rapped by the Advertising Standards Authority for claiming that it had ordered 785 "trains" when the real figure was 785 carriages. SWT argued that the leaflet in question was "public relations material" and not governed by the ASA's code (ie leaving SWT free to lie).

Now an SWT press ad says: "South West Trains has placed the UK's biggest ever train order of 155 new trains at a cost of £1bn." Most people would read that to mean that, er, SWT is investing £1bn in trains; even the Evening Standard's transport editor was fooled. In fact Angel Trains leasing company is buying them, the value of the order placed in 2001 was £640m, and 30 of the trains in that order won't now be used by SWT.

SWT's ad gives no credit to the people who are really funding the new trains: Britain's taxpayers. Last year SWT's subsidy rose 400 percent, ostensibly to cover leases on new trains. Over its three-year franchise, SWT will get £8.70 subsidy for every man, woman and child in the UK.

DO "new" Labour ministers really expect their own party members to swallow their inane arguments for keeping the current rail shambles?

When the Labour party conference voted for renationalistion, transport secretary Alistair Darling warned delegates that that would deprive the railways of £70m a week of private investment. But private firms invest that money because they can recover much more than £70m. It's public-sector borrowing at sky-high interest rates and a nationalised railway could borrow the same money much cheaper.

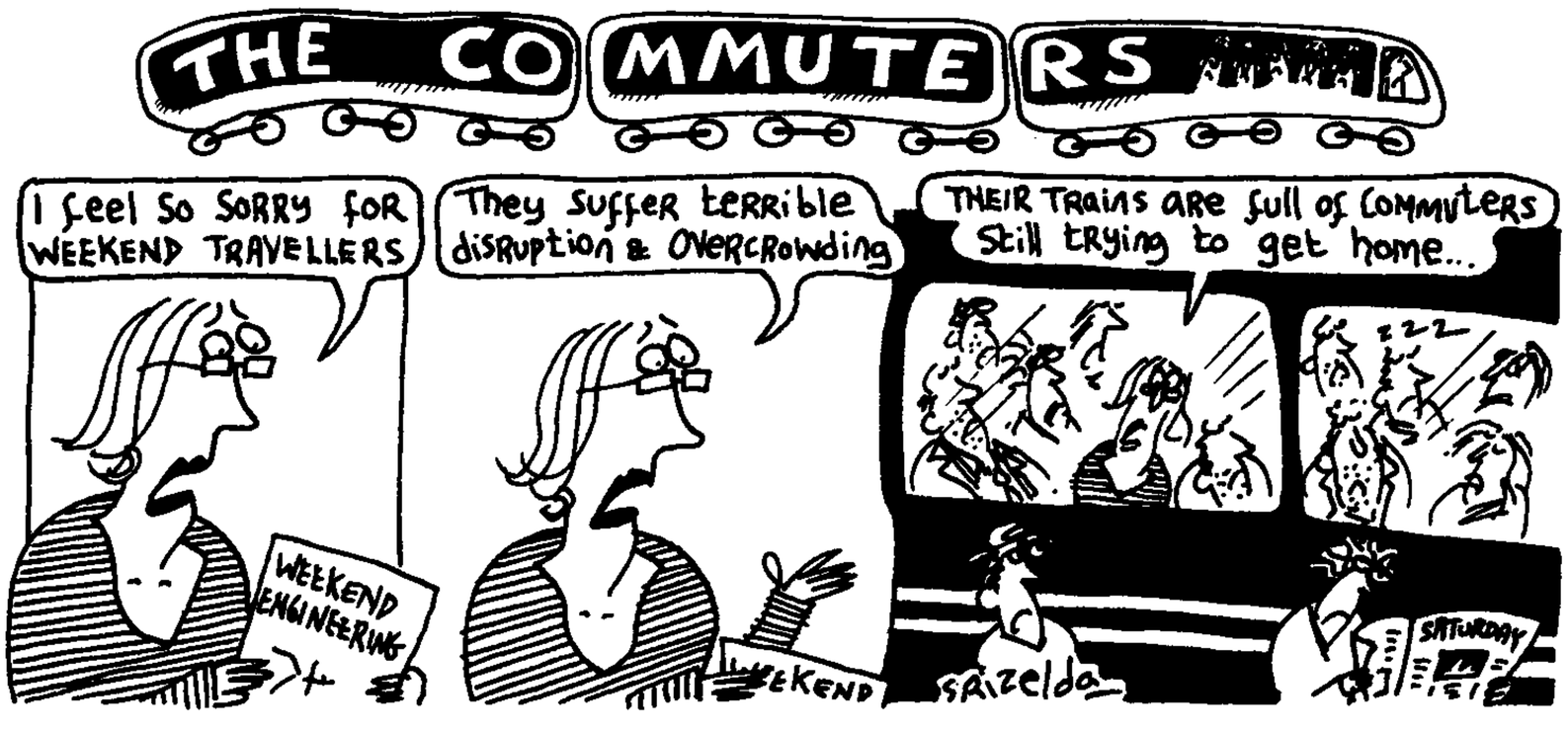
Chancellor Gordon Brown claimed it would cost £22bn to buy the railways back. If there's any substance to that figure (which arises every time "new" Labour plucks it from the air), it must relate to buying out all rail firms immediately instead of waiting for franchises to expire or default and ensuring future new trains are owned by the state. Brown ignored the gigantic cost of not renationalising, including the bureaucratic payroll. The system is so expensive that services are being cut, and complete service withdrawals and route closures could follow the general election.

If Brown thinks changing the status quo is prohibitively expensive, why is "new" Labour bent on returning South Eastern Trains to the private sector through a costly franchise competition and complex legal preparations? SET has been run by the state since Connex was kicked out last year. SET's main objective is to provide a service, rather than maximise profits. Latest figures show SET's performance continued to improve year-on-year (82.8 percent of peak trains on time versus 81 the same period last year); the other south-of-London networks – both in private hands – declined sharply (South West Trains: 78.7 to 75.4 percent; Southern: 84.8 to 78.5).

DARLING and Brown should look at the Isle of Wight line to see why privatised rail is such a rip-off. Last year Stagecoach got £3.1m subsidy (58 percent more than in 1997-98, the franchise's first full year) for this 8.5-mile route.

Rail Professional magazine reports that leasing Island Line's 12 carriages nets £140,000 a year for HSBC bank's rail arm. That might be reasonable if HSBC had supplied new trains recently, but these date from the year Hitler invaded Austria. They worked more than their intended life-span on London Underground and even scrap merchants say the 66-year-old trains are worthless. Rail Professional says HSBC has pocketed more than £1m in eight years for trains worth almost nothing, making them "the most expensive trains anywhere in the world".

'Dr B. Ching'



ROTTEN BOROUGHS

OUSELEY DOES IT

FACED with the threat of investigation by the Commission for Racial Equality into allegations of "ethnic cleansing" by the London borough of Southwark, the council has tried to head the CRE off at the pass by announcing its own "independent" inquiry, to be headed by the commission's former chief executive, Lord (Herman) Ouseley.

Concerns about the council's planning decisions centre on the grant of permission to a flats development by Fairview Homes, currently the subject of fraud inquiry by Inspector Knacker (*Eyes passim*). The application was bulldozed through as part of a "regeneration" plan for Camberwell, forcing the closure of a number of small, mainly black-owned local businesses, to be replaced by – yawn – a Sainsbury's, a cinema and a health club. Suspended Labour councillor Tony "three-in-a-bed" Ritchie, now spending more time with his Thai bar girls, continues to assist Knacker with his inquiries, as do two senior planning officers suspended in February.

The Lib Dem council's leadership is trying to restrict Ouseley's remit and ensure the inquiry is conducted in secret. Locals, however, are calling for a full and open inquiry. A split has opened up between chief executive Bob Coomber and council leader Nick Stanton. Coomber is telling anyone who will listen that Stanton is the obstacle to peace with the locals, while Stanton raves that Black Awareness Group spokesman Raymond Stevenson – owner of the Imperial Gardens nightclub, one of the businesses forced to close – should be shunned as "an enemy of the council".

NASTY ASTLEY

JOHN ASTLEY, former Lib Dem Bristol city councillor, was sentenced to five months in prison on 27 September after pleading guilty to 11 charges of election fraud.

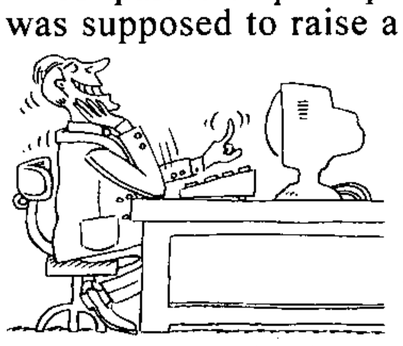
Astley's new sentence came shortly after he had completed a 15-month stretch for downloading 5,500 images of child pornography – including images of rape, sado-masochism and bestiality – on to his council computer. He got another four months for jumping bail and fleeing to Amsterdam last year. The press was restricted from reporting on the child porn trial pending the outcome of the election fraud case, in which Astley admitted forging proxy vote application forms before last year's council elections.

Amazingly, Astley continued to claim his £9,200-a-year allowance while he was on remand in Horfield prison, Bristol, resigning just a fortnight before he would have been disqualified under the rule which says councillors must attend at least one meeting every six months. An application for bail was refused at Bristol crown court when the prosecution said Astley would probably use it to attend a council meeting in order to keep the allowances meter ticking. A nomination for Rotten Boroughs' "brass-necked councillor of the year" award has been forwarded to the judges.

CLICK AS A BRICK

SANDWELL, near Birmingham, is one of the most deprived areas in the West Midlands. So it seemed a good idea to the Labour council to support "Click! Sandwell", an ambitious scheme to help regenerate the area using the white heat of new technology.

A "partnership" of public and private bodies was supposed to raise a total of £22m to train



27,000 people of all ages in computer skills. But, four years into the project, the plug was pulled after it was discovered that fewer than 1,200 students had obtained any sort of qualification and only 15 out of 226 disadvantaged youngsters targeted by the scheme had obtained jobs.

Sandwell council's cabinet agreed to log off Click! last month after Advantage West Midlands, the regional development agency, said it would no longer prop up the project after £6m of taxpayers' money had been spent for little result. The business community had been stingy in its support, stumping up only £500,000 in four years rather than a hoped-for £9m.

Sandwell council, which had been due to invest £7.5m over seven years, had only put in £90,000 so far, although a spokesman told the *Eye* that the council's principal contribution had been "officer support and facilities". Indeed. Critics say Sandwell's pisspoor management of the project had a lot to do with Click!'s main failings – insufficient take-up, uninspiring courses and poor marketing.

● MEANWHILE Sandwell is trying to work out how it came to pay our old friends Capita more than £1m for "advice" on how to semi-privatise its housing stock, without anyone noticing. Crapita "consultants" were paid £1,100 a day each for more than 18 months before alarm bells rang over the spiralling cost. Crapita staff took over the housing department, which controls 30,000 homes, in preparation for its conversion into an "arms length management organisation" (Almo). Future contracts with Crapita have been ruled out in the absence of proof that the council will get value for money.

WITCH HUNT

OFFICERS at failing Hull city council have been accused of using the Standards Board for England (SBE) – the quango which polices the behaviour of councillors – to intimidate Independent members.

Former Labour councillor Chris Jarvis, now leader of the council's small Independent group, has written to Patricia Hughes, deputy chair of the SBE, to complain about the way his group has been targeted.

In July Independent councillor Nadene Burton was suspended for five months by the adjudication panel for England, the sentencing arm of the SBE. Her crime was to have been "disrespectful" to officers by claiming in an election newsletter that Hull's housing department could do better in tackling anti-social behaviour on its estates. This is the same housing department that was recently stripped of its single "star" rating and is now classed as "poor".

Independent councillor John Considine was threatened by the council's monitoring officer, Margaret Taylor, that he would be reported to the SBE unless he apologised for agreeing *in a council meeting* with the recommendation of government inspectors on the need for "a chief executive of proven ability" in Hull – the city currently being without a chief exec and run by an emergency team of civil servants. This was the same Margaret Taylor who resigned several company directorships after it was revealed that she had extensive undisclosed business interests in the city.

Cllr Jarvis himself faces five charges at an SBE hearing in December. One arises out of an argument with an officer *in a council meeting*, at which he said it was outrageous that an elderly couple living in a council property in poor condition had been left without heating. Jarvis also faces suspension for allegedly muttering "she's a witch" about a council officer he disagreed with.

● THANK YOU, *Eye* reader Chris Padley, who points out that Lincolnshire CC's headquarters, stomping ground of disgraced former Tory council leader Jim Speechley (*Eyes passim*), boasts a handsome row of robinia trees along the road frontage. The robinia, or "false acacia", is an important symbol in freemasonry and is popular in masons' gardens as a sort of arboreal funny handshake. Just fancy that!

LEVELLING THE PLAYING FIELDS

HOW interesting to hear prime minister Tony Blair promising in his speech to the Labour party conference that there will be "modern sports facilities in every [school], with a guaranteed number of hours of sport per week".

But where are all these schools going to find space for these modern sports facilities? Perhaps Mr Blair has forgotten that in the four years up to last March, the number of applications to flog off playing fields for development more than doubled to 1,297 a year; while between October 1998 and March 2003, the secretary of state for the environment refused to grant permission for development in only two out of 176 cases.

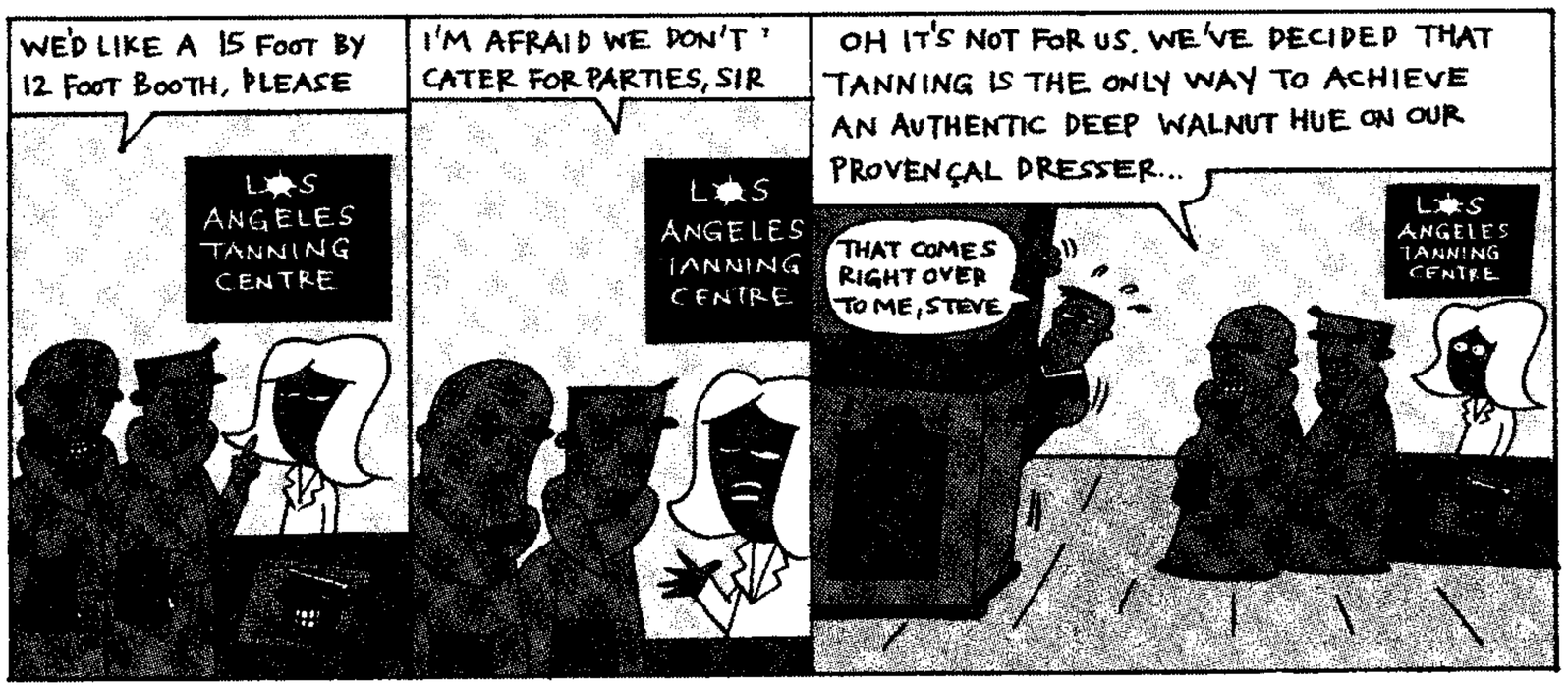
WHO would have thought that the London Playing Fields Society (LPFS) would turn out to be such an enemy of public open spaces?

The charity has been trying to hold Merton council in south London to ransom over its plans to transform Morden Park into a £7m golf driving range. The park has been leased by the council to the LPFS since 1992 and the charity covers the £50,000 a year running costs. It wanted to hive off a huge chunk of the park for a development featuring 50ft high fences, massive floodlights, a bar and a golf equipment shop, saying that the facility would earn funds to pay for the upkeep of the remaining parkland.

Hundreds of locals objected, saying it was more like an entertainment complex than a sports facility, while London's Green Party pointed out that the huge development in the 200-year-old park would ruin the open space and that the floodlighting would drive away owls.

Merton council therefore rejected the plans, saying it was sure a better scheme could be devised to create new sports facilities without ruining the park. LPFS, however, has thrown all its toys out of the pram, with chairman Lord Cadogan saying that the future of Morden Park is now "at risk" and threatening to end the lease so that responsibility for the upkeep falls back on to the council taxpayer.

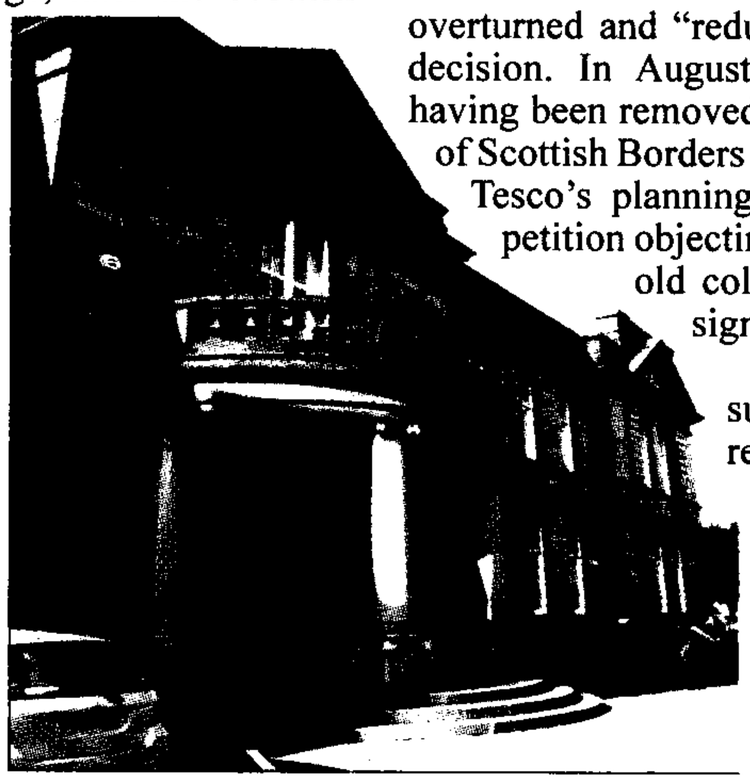
IT'S GRIM UP NORTH LONDON KNIFE & PACKER


WE'D LIKE A 15 FOOT BY 12 FOOT BOOTH, PLEASE
LOS ANGELES TANNING CENTRE
I'M AFRAID WE DON'T CATER FOR PARTIES, SIR
LOS ANGELES TANNING CENTRE
OH IT'S NOT FOR US. WE'VE DECIDED THAT TANNING IS THE ONLY WAY TO ACHIEVE AN AUTHENTIC DEEP WALNUT HUE ON OUR PROVENÇAL DRESSER...
THAT COMES RIGHT OVER TO ME, STEVE
LOS ANGELES TANNING CENTRE

NOOKS and CORNERS

MY PICTURE shows the former South of Scotland Central Technical College in Galashiels, a robust and well-made Edwardian Baroque building of 1908 designed by the local architects, Robert & J.J. Hall.

In 1922 it became the celebrated Scottish Woollen Technical College, later the Scottish College of Textiles; since the 1970s the building has served – perfectly happily – as offices for various government departments. It is now to be demolished: not because it is redundant, inadequate or in poor condition, but to make way for a large extension to a Tesco supermarket.



Last February the building was spot-listed by Historic Scotland, whose chief executive observed: "This is not normal practice but to lose such an iconic building without a chance for public views to be taken into account would be unacceptable. Government policy states that no worthwhile building should be lost unless it is demonstrated beyond reasonable doubt that every effort has been taken to find ways of keeping it."

Quite. But Tesco Stores Ltd went for judicial review on the grounds that the listing was made when its planning application was "live"; and in June the court of session in Edinburgh overturned and "reduced" Historic Scotland's decision. In August, this tiresome obstacle having been removed, the planning committee of Scottish Borders council voted in favour of Tesco's planning application – despite a petition objecting to the demolition of the old college building with 1,740 signatures.

We all know that supermarket chains are regarded with deep reverence. But it would be interesting to know why the councillors – including the leader of Scottish Borders council, Cllr D. Parker – are so keen to support Tesco and acquiesce in the gratuitous destruction of a popular local landmark.

'Piloti'

MUSIC & MUSICIANS

THIS month Britain's concert halls and orchestras should be getting into gear again after the summer lull, promising how rosy things will be over the new season with sharper programmes, easier booking, cleaner foyers, etc.

But not at the South Bank Centre, which is promising only more chaos and disruption as the Festival Hall edges toward total shut-down for refurbishment next spring. Patrons have already been challenged with nightly games of Hunt-the-Box-Office when they arrive and find the ticket booths have moved to places nobody would ever guess. When they eventually track the damned things down, there's a surprise in wait that's set to spark a major row.

Peremptorily, the SBC has ushered in the new season with a new ticketing policy that ends the old-established automatic price concession for the elderly. From now on the OAP concession will only go to those who additionally qualify for the government's new pension credit. In effect, this is a means-test; and a severe one in that to be eligible for pension credit you have to be seriously poor with little in the way of savings.

Pensioners are understandably not happy with the change. The National Pensioners Convention has described it as "an outrage" to deprive so many OAPs of a benefit they have enjoyed for years.

The SBC, though, isn't budging and insists that money saved by cutting back the concessions will be used to fund reduced-price tickets for other disadvantaged members of society: people on income support, disability credit and the like.

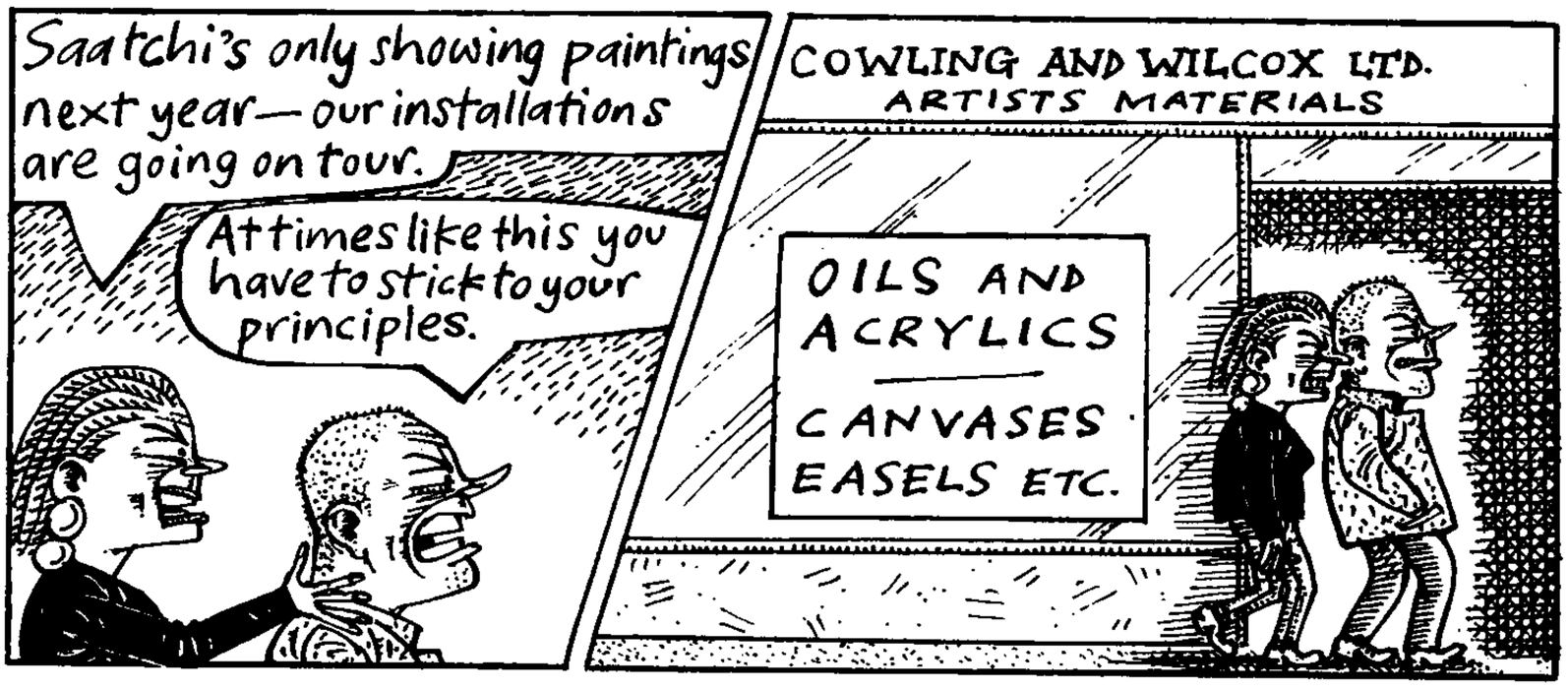
The truth is that most of these groups were already offered price reductions, so the SBC's attempt to pass itself off as Robin Hood isn't convincing. Moreover, audiences at the Festival Hall – like those for classical music everywhere – are getting ever older and staggering toward the point where hardly anybody turning up for tickets *wasn't* eligible for the OAP concession. Hence the need to take action.

But it leaves another problem. If the SBC now drives away its ageing patrons, who will be left?

'Lunchtime O'Boulez'

YOUNG BRITISH ARTISTS

BY BIRCH


Saatchi's only showing paintings next year— our installations are going on tour.
At times like this you have to stick to your principles.
COWLING AND WILCOX LTD.
ARTISTS MATERIALS
OILS AND ACRYLICS
CANVASES
EASELS ETC.

Letters

Dropping the Piloti?

Sir,

Have I got news for you? My copy of Eye 1116 (subscription paid and renewed without fail) dropped comfortingly on to the mat on 29 September and is, as ever, a good but not entirely accurate, read. May I elaborate?

There has not been a theological college at Lampeter for decades, and whilst theology/ religious studies may be studied there and elsewhere in Wales as academic subjects, the only Anglican college in Wales which trains individuals for ministry in the Christian churches is St Michael's.

St Michael's is not closing, and the archbishop has no power to close it. It is managed by trustees (of whom the archbishop is but one) for whom the college buildings have become a financial burden too great to sensibly bear any longer. This is a state of affairs about which the college's auditors have regularly warned. So, a sensible decision to market the buildings with a view to the college either sharing the site with others or relocating to premises more suitable and more manageable was made by the trustees, their sole aim being to place the college on a secure financial footing so that it could continue indefinitely to train Christian ministers, and whatever decisions the trustees make are referred to the charity commission for scrutiny. The trustees feel strongly that a failure to do something about the buildings would actually jeopardise the future of the institution, could lead to closure, and would undoubtedly call into question their own management of the trust.

The college buildings are not at risk. Many of them, the Chapel included, are listed by CADW. The greatest risk which the buildings face would be their remaining the sole responsibility of the trustees who, even with temporary grants from the Church in Wales, have insufficient income to fully maintain let alone improve them, and scarcely any capital to fall back on. A new set up will ensure the safe-keeping and maintenance of these buildings on their rather lovely site for many years to come.

As for the cathedral library, ownership and responsibility for its contents were and are that of the Dean and Chapter of Llandaff Cathedral, not of the archbishop or the college trustees. The volumes were moved to the college by agreement some time ago as a temporary measure when space and conditions at the cathedral were deemed inappropriate for their remaining there. Most of the better volumes were disposed of to finance both the provision of shelving and the strengthening of the floor of the room at the college where the remaining and mostly unremarkable volumes were to be housed. It subsequently became apparent that conditions in that room were not suitable for the storage of the volumes, which had begun to deteriorate, and the trustees requested the Dean and Chapter to exercise their proper responsibility for the books. Thus the process, which ended with the books being properly dealt with by experts, was begun. There was no secrecy, no cultural vandalism and no motive other than a desire by the college to have its room clear and for the books to be properly handled by their owners. A squalid sale or devious barbarism? I think not.

VERY REV. JOHN DAVIES,

Dean of Brecon & Secretary to the Trustees of St Michael's College, Llandaff.

Aisle of dreams

Sir,

I'm sorry every one, it may be my fault that Tesco has had to put its prices up (Tesco takes the biscuit, 1116). Staff there have always allowed me to keep my child quiet with seedless grapes, and not charged me for the empty bag at the check out. Whenever I have had trouble with toddler running off or baby crying; instead of standing about criticising, they offer practical help. Things are organised to make life as easy as possible for the shopper who is pregnant or looking after pre-school children. They don't have sweets at every check out, the toilets are clean, accessible and well stocked, the café is cheap and convenient. The queue at the check out is short, help with packing and taking to the car is offered ungrudgingly and service is generally more efficient and cheerful than anywhere else. Perhaps that's why they make so much profit.

My mother may well be shocked, but I don't look at the price I pay for every item -- I look at the total, and it still compares well with Sainsbury's. If I wanted cheaper groceries I'd shop at Quicksave, Netto's or ASDA. If I want more up-market stuff I'll go to Waitrose (although they are not as child-friendly). The Eye is in danger of knowing the price of everything and the value of nothing.

Yours truly,
RUTH HOLT,
Mellor, Cheshire.

Tesco milks it

Sir

Your In the Back article highlighting Tesco's ability to fleece customers concludes "how else do you make an £822m profit in six months?" The answer's obvious. Shaft your suppliers. The recently published MDC report into margins in the dairy chain is typical. It estimates farmers profits at 0p per litre, processors at 2p per litre and supermarkets at 13p per litre. Congratulations Terry Leahy, keep on screwing UK agriculture, oh sorry perhaps that should read continue the great job of cost control on raw material purchasing (not too hard when you use your buying power in the way you do).

Yours faithfully
ANTONY ADORIAN,
Via email.

Re Joyce

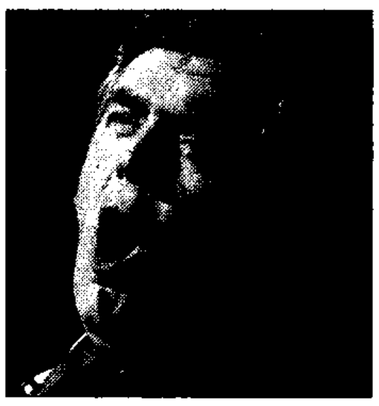
Sir,

In Eye 1116, under the unwitty heading "Even Further Educashun...", you assert that Graham Joyce has been awarded a "PhD by Nottingham Trent University for his penetrating 140,000-word study of Smoking Poppy, a novel... by Graham Joyce". This is not true. Joyce's PhD is not, as you imply, a PhD in literature; it is a PhD in creative writing. The standard practice for such degrees is that the student submits an example of his/her creative writing, together with a critical commentary upon his/her writing practice: the regulations at Nottingham Trent stipulated a 15,000-word limit for this second part of the submission. Because Graham is a published writer (and a very good and highly regarded one) he submitted two published works, his novel Smoking Poppy and a novella Leningrad Nights. The commentary he submitted was an analysis of his general writing practice, not a critical reading of his own fiction.

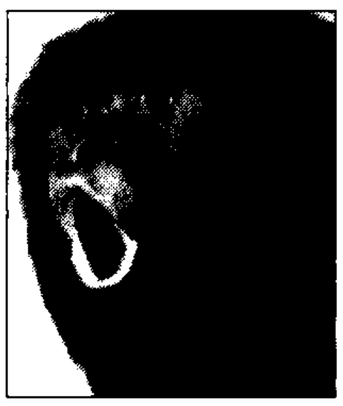
You try, mean-spiritedly, to suggest that something underhand has happened here. It really hasn't. This is the standard way of examining a creative writing PhD (perhaps you'd like to suggest some other way of doing it?). I was one of the two examiners who read the work and conducted the viva. I was very impressed with the quality of the creative writing, the calibre of the commentary, and the candidate's performance in viva. Graham's doctorate is well-deserved, and something of which he should be proud.

Sincerely,
ADAM ROBERTS,
Dept of English, Royal Holloway, University of London.

Lookalike



Howler



Gordon

Sir,

I was wondering if anyone has ever noticed the uncanny resemblance between our Chancellor and a Howler monkey?

Yours,
DOMINIC SYMON, age 11
Owestry, Shropshire.

Patrick's day

Sir,

Your article on the secretive Euro-institution of the EIB (1115) was most interesting. It is always fun to read about one's boss in the Eye, and my boss, Patrick Klaedke, did merit your attention for his undeclared interests, though more for his foolishness at becoming embroiled in such a farce than for the likelihood of professional impropriety. Unlike some of the other cases mentioned, the companies Patrick is affiliated with are small fry and very unlikely to have been rewarded by the association.

I do have a tiny nitpick, however. Patrick is not the financial controller any longer and has not been for around two years. He is now the head of IT.

Regards,
EIB EXPERT,
Via email.

Gender agenda

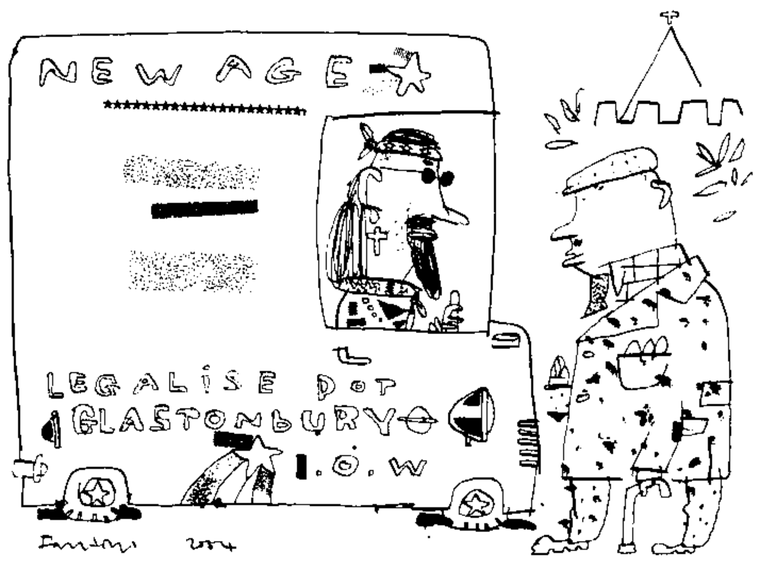
Sir,

Nicky Campbell was quite right to say that "Gender has nothing to do with being a man or a woman" (Colemanballs, Eye 1116). Gender is a grammatical term that is applied to nouns. The classic example of gender having nothing to do with being a man or woman is "das Mädchen" (a German girl), whose gender is neuter.

Perhaps you were thinking about sex?

Yours pedantically,
JAMES HOBRO,
Via email.

Scenes You Seldom See



"Somewhere to stay? Sure. There's the village green, the station car park, and plenty of open fields"

Whale wail

Sir,

The article in your September 17/30 issue, "In For The Krill", that featured on page 27 contained some misunderstandings regarding Japan's whaling practices.

You must already be aware of our basic position, namely that Japan strongly believes that the preservation and utilisation of natural resources, including whales, should be based on scientific evidence rather than emotional value. I would like to reiterate the fact that since many species of whales are increasing and abundant, Japan has consistently maintained the position that scientific advice indicates that whaling can safely be resumed.

In response to your articles on this subject, I would like to explain our point of view. Your allegation that Japan's aid "is a bribe" is totally inaccurate. This is obvious from the fact that Japan's aid has supported anti-whaling countries as well, such as India and Argentina, which are major recipients. Besides, a country such as Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, for example, has been permitted by the International Whaling Commission (IWC) to hunt humpback whales, while some other countries have been hunting pilot whales. Regardless of Japan's aid, they have their own reasons to support whaling as conducted in a sustainable manner.

Moreover, at this year's IWC meeting, commissioners of member states including the UK agreed that the document accusing Japan of buying developing countries' votes, which had been distributed to the IWC by an NGO, was unfounded, and that they would consider taking measures to prevent any similar occurrence in the future.

Please bear these facts in mind in your future reporting of Japan in the context of whaling.

Yours sincerely,
JUN KODA,
Counsellor, Embassy of Japan.

Eye's right

Sir,

Alas for Joseph Holmes (Letters, Eye 1116), we pedants know better, as Houseman says. "Res ipsa loquitur" would be "the matter does speak for itself" (indicative), rather than "let the matter speak for itself", which would require the subjunctive, "loquatur".

Not only that, but he failed to spot that the Eye was in fact quite correct in using the rare but perfectly classical third person legalistic or contingent imperative "loquitor", a form well suited for proclamations ex-cathedra. So there.

Yours sincerely,
DANIEL SICKA,
Balliol College.

A non-fascist writes...

Sir,

Let me correct some errors contained within your HP Sauce column (Eye 1115) concerning my support for the Adamsgate Action Group. The group was formed by concerned residents of Havering, but in particular those from Rainham, to promote plans for a marina and ecology park in the area.

It is open to all residents and is supported by all the borough's parties. James Brokenshire has indeed assisted in the campaign but then so have others whom we have acknowledged. Indeed the sitting Labour MP John Cryer is very supportive and he addressed our public meeting only this weekend. I was pleased to see him there.

As for myself, I am just part of a wider team in the action group, all of whom are skilled in their various fields and tasks. Although I was in the National Front political party some 15 years ago I have moved on. I am now a member of Third Way which I regard as a centrist party which has no sympathy with fascist ideology at all.

Yours truly,
G. WILLIAMSON,

Via email.

Third instinct

Sir,

A small item in your HP Sauce column (Eye 1115) described the Third Way as "crypto-fascist". So secret is this fascism that none of our members or supporters are aware of it! The Third Way advocates direct democracy (along Swiss lines) and co-operative economics. We welcome members from all religious, political and ethnic backgrounds. We aren't imposing ASBOs and curfews or advocating political vetting of the civil service. Nor do we want to force people to carry ID cards. If you are looking for "fascists" may I direct your attention to the party of government whose ambition seems to be to interfere in as many areas of the lives of citizens as possible.

Sincerely,
JEANNIE TRUEMAN,

Third Way, London SW7.

Quackers?

Sir,

It is interesting to note that the latest two reviews on a possible link between MMR and autism (Eye 1116) were published in the Journal of American Physicians and Surgeons. Despite what its name suggests, this is a rather obscure journal, favouring oddball statements: on page 83 of the same issue it also has an article advocating the re-introduction of DDT (http://aapsonline.org/jpands/jpands0903.htm). DDT is a toxic insecticide banned in the 70s and 80s in most European countries and the US, but still polluting and affecting our environment because it is not biodegradable.

KOEN DE SMET,

Ghent, Belgium (but with a subscription to Private Eye).

Eating her words

Sir,

Apologies for adding to the tedious debate on healthy eating; however I feel compelled to defend Catherine Andrew against Claire Robinson's comments (Letters, 1116). Referring to the original subject of Gillian McKeith's "You are what you eat", a friend of mine with more money than sense bought the book and acted upon the guidance literally, spending three-figure sums on vitamins and supplements and making herself physically sick trying to neck 18 pills a day – so an approach which is arguably neither cheap nor healthy.

Keep up the good work.
LAURA,

Ipswich,

Colemanballs

£10 paid for contributions

"He [Glen Johnson] is breathing pretty hard, but I suppose that's his own way of getting air into his lungs."
JIM NEILLY, BBC
(David Beckett)

"It was the centenary event to mark twenty-five years since we won the cup."
TREVOR FRANCIS
(Paul Howard)

"Deep in stoppage time McCammon hit the post from Sweeney's free kick but that was as good as it got for Wise's side."
news.bbc.co.uk
(Iain Russell)

"And Fulham are not retreating out of their shells much at all..."
Commentator, Radio 5 Live
(Rob Hill)

"Larry [Simon Grayson] did well in midfield today, but we do need someone in there with more legs."
COLIN HENDRY, news.bbc.co.uk
(Iain Russell)

I-SPY *Corsica*

Submitted by Martin Crossley. £10 paid for similar submissions. *(SAE required for return of photographs)*

Scanner scandal

Sir,

Further to your page two report on the use of MRI scanners (Eye 1115), I wish to correct the mistaken perception relating to Frenchay Hospital in Bristol. The report states that "two scanners are unused because of a shortage of radiologists". However, this is untrue. All of North Bristol NHS Trust's MRI scanners are currently in operation.

The provision of a mobile MRI scanner by the department of health has helped the trust to remove more than 200 patients from its waiting list for a scan. Future visits by the mobile scanner will eventually lead to hundreds of patients being removed from the waiting list, reducing the anxiety of people waiting for diagnosis and treatment of their condition.

The trust has regularly expanded the provision of MRI and has recently commissioned a third scanner. Absence of appropriately trained staff currently limit the hours of this scanner but it has already resulted in an increase in patients being scanned within the trust. Despite this, demand continues to rise, in large part due to the excellence of our clinical services, and the additional service provided by the National MRI Initiative is thus very welcome.

This is not a problem unique to Bristol, which is why the department of health introduced the additional capacity in the short to medium term. Departments are already working extended hours, so this extra help will reduce existing pressure on existing NBT staff and resources. This free support is welcomed in the interests of providing faster diagnostics for patients.

Yours faithfully,
MR NICHOLAS GODDEN,

Chairman, Trust Headquarters, Frenchay Hospital.

● We're happy to clarify that two Frenchay scanners are not unused all the time, but one scanner is unused some of the time. Private Eye spoke to the North Bristol NHS Trust press office when preparing its article. (MRI scanners lying idle at Frenchay had already been a matter of comment in the specialist press, notably Hospital Doctor magazine.) A trust spokesman promised to clarify the scanning situation but failed to do so.

Body doubles

Sir,

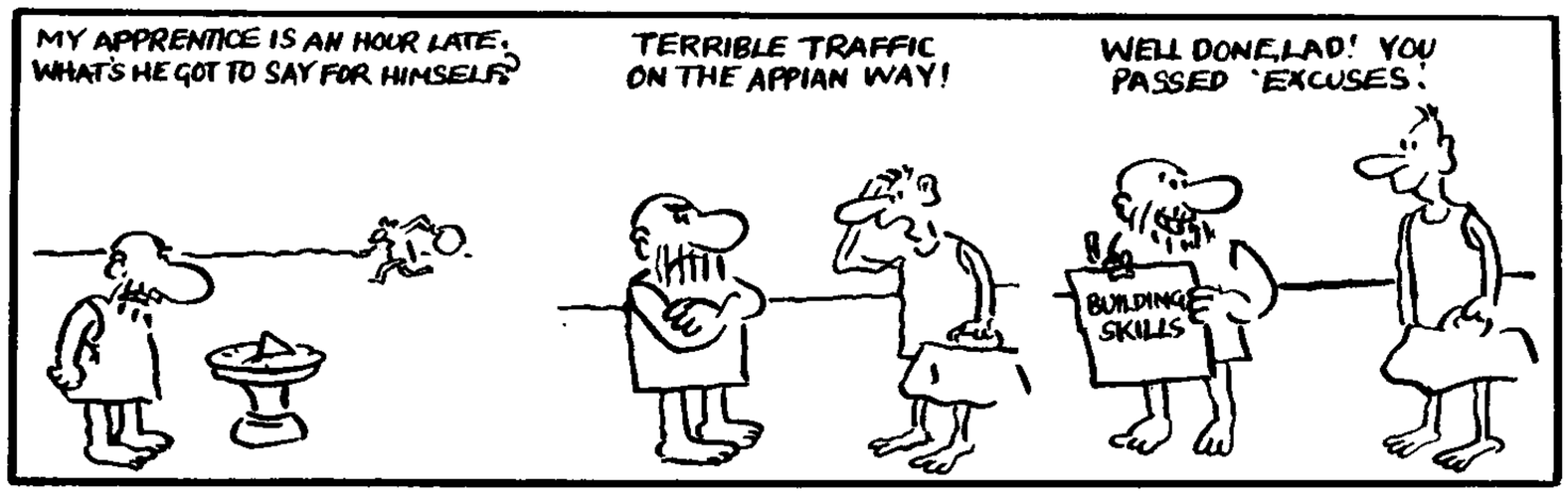
I'm surely not alone among keen-eyed readers of your esteemed organ in noticing the remarkable similarity between the hilariously funny Supermodels cartoons on page 9 of issue 1115 and page 13 of issue 1116. Presumably you are so concerned about the tragedy of eating disorders among teenage girls you felt compelled to "bring it up" again?

Your faithfully,
JEREMY BOYCE,

Sauve, France.

HOM SAP

AUSTIN


MY APPRENTICE IS AN HOUR LATE. WHAT'S HE GOT TO SAY FOR HIMSELF?
TERRIBLE TRAFFIC ON THE APPIAN WAY!
WELL DONE, LAD! YOU PASSED 'EXCUSES'.
BUILDING SKILLS

● *On sale now – Colemanballs 12. Call 0870 7501712 or order online from www.private-eye.co.uk* ●

Letter from **Guantanamo Bay**

from Our Own Correspondent

THESE days there's an air of excitement among us detainees from the Americans' war on terror. Praise be, we're finally getting some international attention. And now the spotlight is on, there's no switching it off.

At least that's what our legal representatives tell those of us awaiting trial by what the Americans call "military commissions". There are 15 of us in Camp Echo, a special unit for those before justice. Unlike some of the other billets over the last three years, we are allowed to talk to lawyers, interpreters and each other. And there's no more interrogation with dogs or sleep deprivation like in the early days. Something to do with some place in Iraq called Abu Ghraib.

Among our number is an Australian, David "Mustapha" Hicks. He says the commissions are more like kangaroo courts. But that doesn't translate well into the Arabic, Urdu, Turkish and Pashto most of us speak. Still, we are being taught English and law by our captors, so it won't be long before we work it out. By the end, we may be the best educated terrorists in captivity.

Mustapha Hicks wasn't too impressed when proceedings got underway last month. He says the Americans "have forgotten to switch the light on, and they've fucked themselves up the arse". It's not the most elegant or Islamic of phrases. But he means that they have set up a legally unsustainable trial process for us – and given us the means to circumvent it.

Not that Mustapha fits the conventional image of an Islamist freedom fighter. His father, visiting from Adelaide, told him he'd put on too much weight in prison. The old boy says Mustapha is no terrorist – just a silly white boy looking for adventure, and on the lam from his estranged wife Down Under.

Also in the first group to go before justice is "Crazy Ali" al-Hamza. He did appear to admit in court that he was "from al-Qaeda". But he also says he is the bastard son of the late Ayatollah Khomeini. His many confused mutterings lead most of us to the conclusion that "Crazy Ali" really is a few camels short of the full caravan – just as he was when the Americans brought him here two years ago.

It's been a long hard three years for most of the detainees in Guantanamo Bay. After relentless questioning and some occasional torture, a few have cracked. It's not clear how much those now singing about al-Qaeda actually know about the glorious Muslim brotherhood. But the real hard men are better able to keep schtum. None of them are in the first batch at the commissions.

It's not just brother Mustapha who has his doubts about the commissions, last used after the Second World War nearly 60 years ago. Human rights groups, legal activists and the media are all pointing to the deficiencies of the process.

John Kerry, the Democrat challenger for the US presidency, says he wants to give us real trials with civilian appeal courts. And he may have a point. The soldiers who sit on the commission are either unqualified or unsuited. One admitted he didn't know what the Geneva conventions were. Another was praised by superior officers during the Afghan conflict for "tracking and killing Taliban".

Our lawyers – the military officers among them with their eyes firmly on lucrative careers at the civilian bar once this is all over – think this alone could help acquit us. None of it bodes well for the war on terror, of course. As we've learned in our time in Guantanamo Bay, the enemy may have a lot of money and technology, but he's just not ready for the fight we're going to give him.

FUNNY OLD WORLD

COMPILED BY **VICTOR LEWIS-SMITH**

"It was God's decision that my father had to die," Pieter Meintjies told the crowd gathered outside the mortuary in the Free State town of Hertzogville, "and it is His decision that my father will rise again. Pastor Francis has prophesied that Oom Paul will rise from the dead like Lazarus after 50 days, and today is that happy day. The miracle will take place soon, very soon, and we don't even consider the possibility that my father won't rise, because he will. It's a certainty, really it is."

The expectant crowd filling Van Rensburg Street was there to witness a miracle predicted by Pastor David Francis, a self-proclaimed prophet and part-time roofer from Durban. "When the Meintjies family brought the body here," mortuary owner Nico Foulds told reporters, "they said they wanted it frozen, and not buried. I explained that it would cost R250 to keep it on ice in the mortuary, and they agreed, saying it had been prophesied that Oom Paul would rise from the dead after forty days. When that didn't happen, they came back and told us that Pastor Francis had misheard what God had told him, and that He had actually said fifty days. But I've told the family that if the corpse doesn't arise today, I'm putting it in a body bag and taking it round to their house, because it's starting to rot, and the crowds outside are interfering with business."

Oom Paul failed to rise from the dead, and the mortuary returned the body to his widow for burial. "We still believe he will rise again, but exactly when is God's will," said a family spokesman. Pastor Francis has not been seen since. *(The Sunday Independent [South Africa], 1/8/04. Spotter: Stephen Munitz)*

– o –

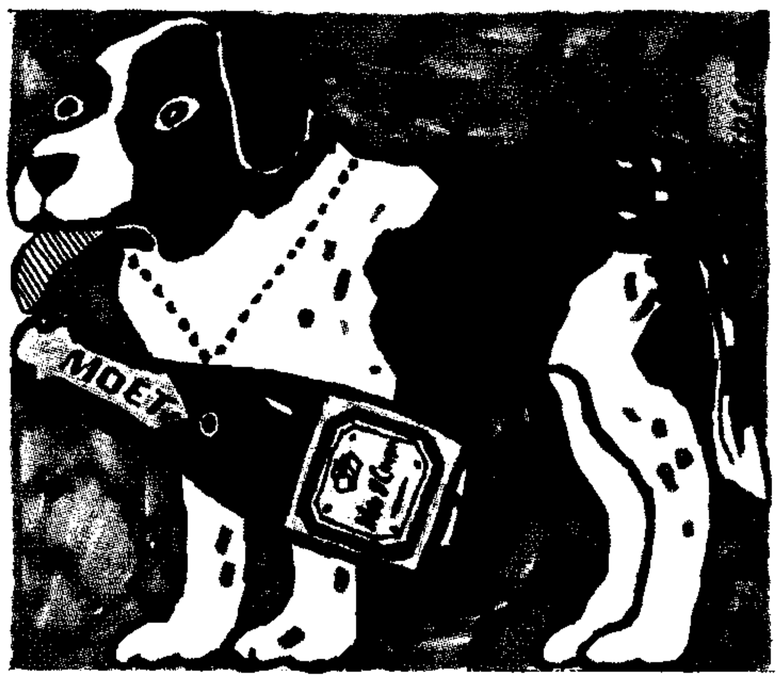
"Although you have pleaded guilty to a charge of sexual assault," Provincial Court Judge Lloyd Malin told Gerald Allan Naud in a court in Edmonton, Alberta, "it's unclear whether you have actually committed any offence. Unsavoury though your conduct has been, you are the only one who has been physically assaulted. I am therefore releasing you on bail, on condition that you are forbidden from approaching females with the intention of trying to get them to perform any sadistic or masochistic act on your person."

Earlier, Edmonton City Police Detective Wil Tonowski described Naud's modus operandi. "The offender has a history of asking women to kick him very hard between the legs, apparently because he derives satisfaction from the pain. His usual method is to approach a woman in a hotel lobby, and tell her that he's made a bet with his buddies. He claims that he'll win the $100 bet if he can make a woman angry enough to kick him in the crotch, and offers her $50 if she'll help him out. If she's willing, they go to an isolated part of the lobby, where he says his buddies can watch them on the security cameras, and asks her to kick him in the groin as hard as possible. The woman usually does so, and when he's recovered, he gives her the $50, and they part. But in truth, there are no buddies, and there is no bet. The guy is more than a masochist, he's not playing with the full deck of cards." (Calgary Sun, 14/8/04. Spotter: Darren Ingram)

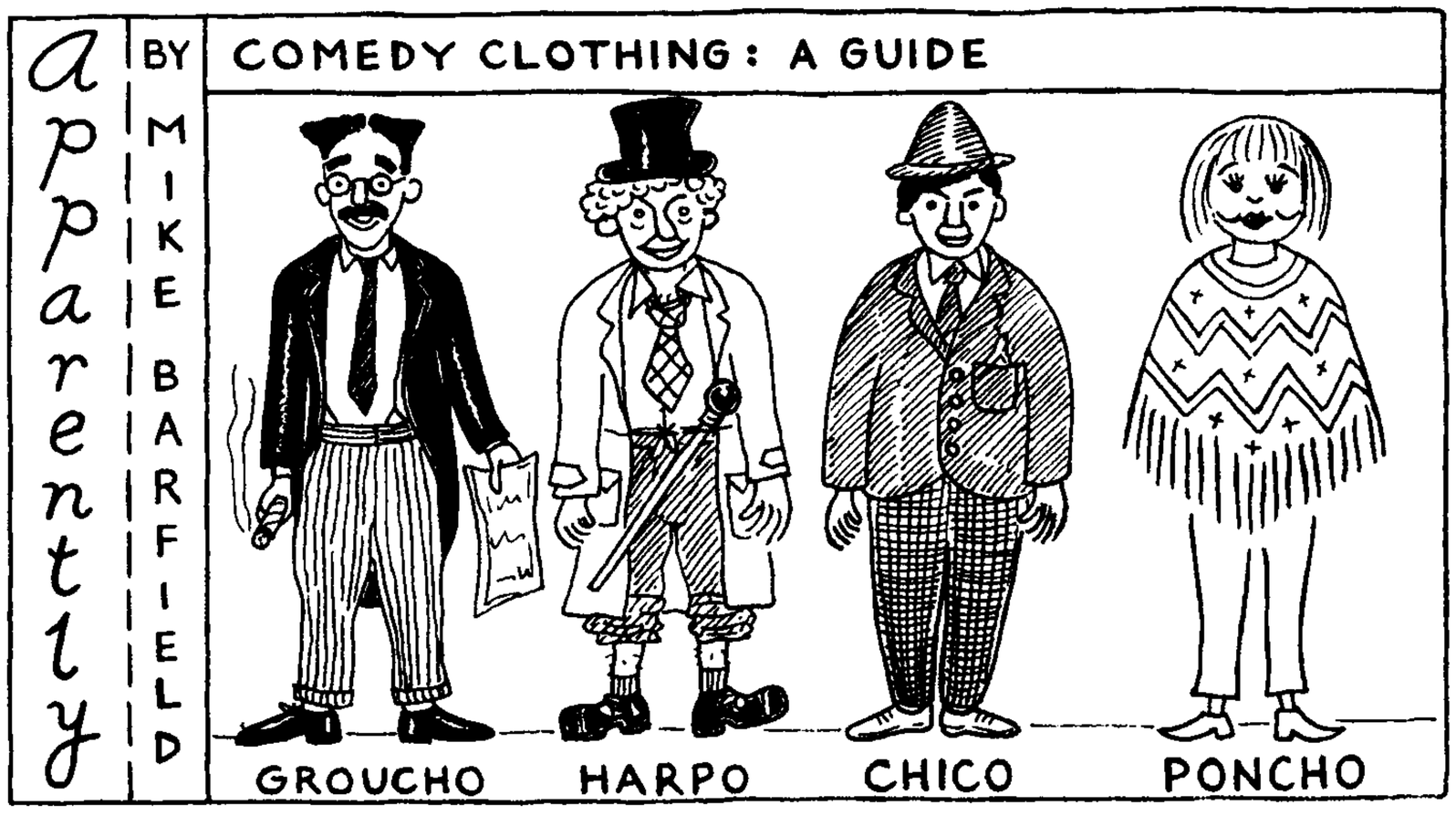
– o –

"I am not aware of any previous divorce cases involving support payments for pets," Professor Rick Cupp of Pepperdine University told reporters, "but I'm not surprised by this one. Animal rights legal activists will certainly favour such awards, because they represent another step towards eradicating the difference between animals and humans in the eyes of the law."

Professor Cupp was commenting on a recent



court case in Edmonton, in which Kenneth Duncan was ordered to pay his ex-wife Barbara Boschee $200 a month in dog support, plus a $2,000 retroactive payment, for care and maintenance of their St Bernard, Crunchy. "I am aware that $200 a month is almost one-third of what you might be expected to pay for a child under federal guidelines," observed Justice Donald Lee, "but I regard it as a reasonable sum for monthly maintenance, considering the size of the four-year-old canine. A St Bernard dog obviously costs more to maintain and feed than the usual small variety, which might need only $25 a month. In view of the irretrievable breakdown of your marriage, no visitation rights are included in this order." *(Canadian Broadcasting Corporation News, 9/8/04. Spotter: Brendan Joseph O'Byrne)*



ST ALBION PARISH NEWS

Incumbent: Rev A.R.P. Blair MA (Oxon)

Somewhere in Africa

Hullo!

And I don't mind telling you, the last few weeks have been pretty mad!

There was all the excitement of the parish outing to Brighton – which, though I say it myself, was a huge success! And I'd particularly like to thank our new curate, Mr Milburn, for describing my closing address as "probably the most inspiring sermon ever given by a vicar!"

Thanks, Alan, and may I return the compliment by saying that your own "few words" were pretty impressive! Certainly a lot better than the blustering sweaty ranting of some of the other speakers who misjudged the occasion rather badly (Not for the first time, eh Gordon!) .

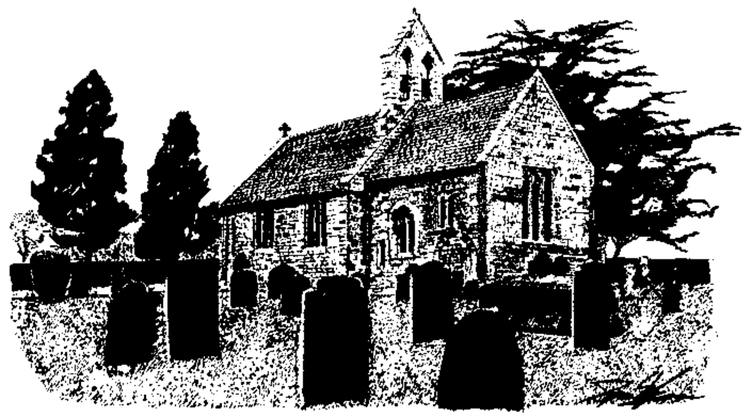
Then, after that, I had to take five minutes off work to have a spot of open heart surgery! You'd think there was something wrong with me!

But just for the doubters, let me make it crystal clear that I am now fitter than ever! As Mr Milburn so wittily put it "Tony, we can see that your heart is really in the job!"

If anyone is unfit around this parish, I suggest that we look at a certain overweight, pasty-faced, over-excitable treasurer who should perhaps 'get a life'– rather than, as Mr Milburn so humorously put it, trying to 'get your job'!

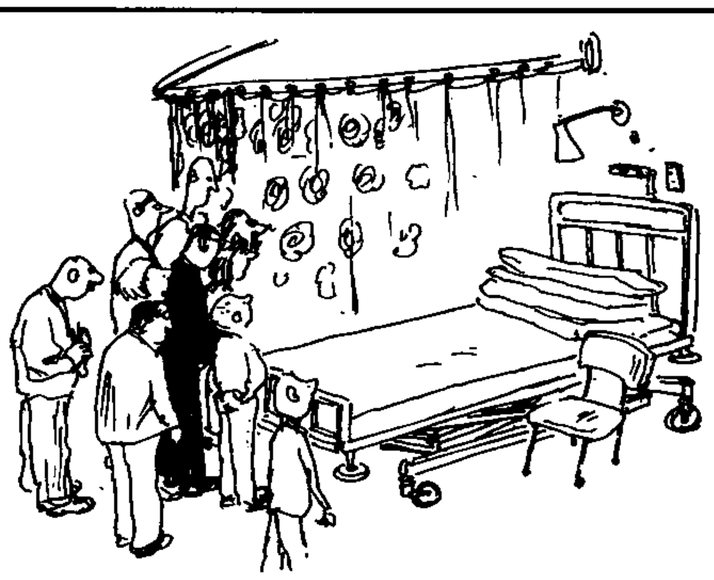
What a pleasure it is to have our new curate around, always ready with a Geordie joke or a comforting word! What a difference he's already made in the parish! If I was thinking of retiring which I'm not, by the way, or certainly not for a very long time then I can't think of anyone better to fill my shoes than young Alan!

Hey, of course I know it's not my decision, and I don't want to be accused of "doing deals" here, but lets face it, say the choice was between Alan and, how can I put it, a less suitable Scottish candidate, then you would hardly need me to tell you which way to vote, would you? And



talking of me not retiring, you may have heard on the parish grapevine that Cherie and I have bought a little 17-bedroom retirement home for when the day comes that Alan and his family move into the vicarage and Cherie and I and little Leo will have to bid you fond farewell!

Obviously that's a very long way ahead, so in the meantime, we're going to do our bit for the housing crisis and become "Good Samaritans", by letting out our new house to needy millionaires, possibly from America or the Middle East!



The hospital bed from which the vicar rose so speedily has became an object of veneration and pilgrimage! By local artist Mr De la Nougerede

And then to cap it all, I had the great privilege of leading our mission to Africa, accompanied by that saint of our time, Father Geldolf of the Blessed Order of the Boomtown Rats.

What a truly inspiring experience it was for our African hosts, to be able to listen to the incomparably wise words of father Bob, as he explained to them in his down-to-earth way, how it was time for them to get their "fockin' act together".

If I have one abiding impression of the two days we spent travelling around the various countries we're planning to sort out, it is of how humble it made me feel to be in that vast continent, and to know that perhaps you are the only person who is in a position to help them.

And it also made me realise how small and how trivial are all the things that people campaign about in St Albion's.

Were there ever any "weapons of destruction"? Oh, puh – leease!!! That was never an issue!

The important thing is that Saddam *wanted* to have weapons of mass destruction.

And as we know from scripture, the intention is just as sinful as the act!

"A man who looketh upon weapons of mass destruction in his heart deserves to be smitten with fire and brimstone" *(The Moron Bible, revised and updated by the Rev. Dubya, with the assistance of Brother Rumsfeld and Sister Condy).*

So I'd like to end with an apology. I'm sorry, but I haven't got anything to apologise for!

I may have been misled by other people,who told me all sorts of things that turned out not to be entirely true.

And I'm genuinely sorry for those people, because misleading the vicar is just about the most serious offence I can think of!

But am I sorry for playing such a leading role in the great crusade against the Evil One?

"Am I fock" as father Bob might put it, in his colourful Gaelic patois!

Yours for the foreseeable future (and even beyond!)

Tony

Thought For The Day

"Do not store up your treasure on earth"

Time and again the good book reminds us that we should not worry about our pensions but trust in the Lord to provide (or not as the case maybe). This should reassure us all especially those parishioners who may be concerned that they are going to have to work for ever or starve.

And there are some other words of comfort as rendered in the new Gordeon's Bible that you will find in all good hotels bedrooms!

"Consider the lilies of the field. They toil hard but do not get a pension at the end of it".

And here is another quotation to cheer you up as you face the prospect of a cold winter with nothing to eat.

"It is very hard for a rich man to get into heaven. So you're better off without a pension" *(Mark, 7.3).* Just think about it!

TB

LIVING SAINT VISITS AFRICA!!

He's the one on the left! A.M.

Parish Postbag

Dear Sir,

I am delighted to see that the recent report on Iraq has confirmed that I was right all along in every respect.

I hope now that the vicar will finally have the decency to admit that he was utterly and completely

Yours sincerely,
Robin Cook,
Galloway Road.

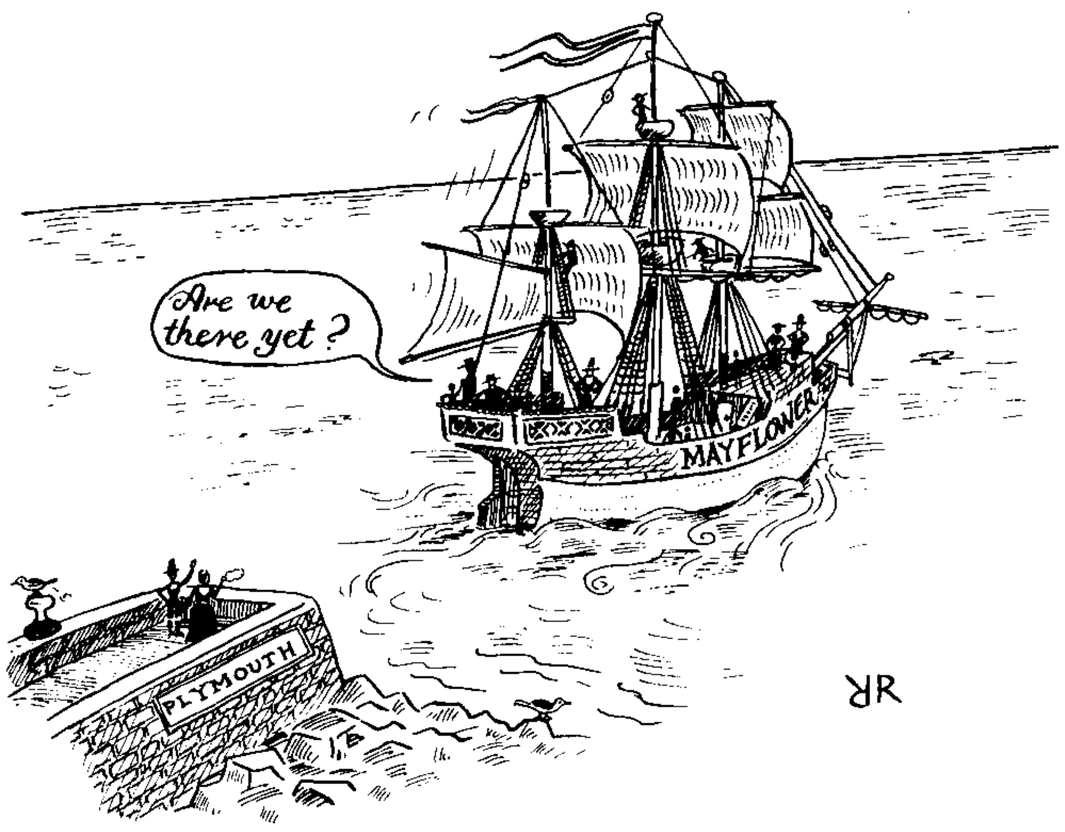
(The editor reserves the right to cut all letters from disgraced former members of the PCC on the grounds that such people should be careful about throwing stones when we know what they got up to in the organ loft!).

● *On sale now – St Albion Parish News Book Seven "The Vicar Digs In!". Call 0870 750 1712 or order online from www.private-eye.co.uk* ●

That All-Purpose Editorial In Full

OUR HEARTS go out to _____ and their family. The whole nation has joined together in collective grief for _____ and our thoughts and prayers are with _____. In churches across the country, candles were lit as the country came to terms with the tragedy of _____. Tributes of flowers were laid outside the home of _____ and there was a two-minute silence in football grounds everywhere. Surely it is time for a lasting memorial to _____ to be erected at public expense, possibly in the form of a fountain or a statue on the fourth plinth. Whatever happens, _____ must not be forgotten.

Tomorrow: Someone else.



GLENDA SLAGG

SHE'S FOOTBALL CRAZEEEE!

■ **DAVID BECKHAM – OK, so he scored a goal but at what cost to his country?!!? Once again, this babyish bad boy from Billericay has let England down by getting a yellow card and deliberately breaking his rib??!? Stick to breaking your wife's heart, mister, that's what you're good at!??!**

■ OUR BECKS!!!! Give him a break, Mr Tabloid, and I don't mean his rib??!? OK, so there was some argy-bargy on the field and some rumpy-pumpy off it??!!!? That's what football's all about!!?! And our David is all about football??!?? Let's judge him on his goals, not his gals!!??! Geddit???!

■ *WAYNE'S COLEEN!!?? What a disgrace??!? She's the spud-faced nipper's teenage totty who's got our spuddy a-moonin' and a-spoonin'* (Get on with it. Ed.). *Oh yeah... where was I... now she's been caught smuggling millions of pounds worth of designer shell suits from America into Britain!??? She should be ashamed of hershelf for shmuggling shell shoots. (You try saying that when you've just had a skinful like I have!) It's enough to make our Wayney hang his spud-faced head in shame!!!??*

■ HERE they are – Glenda's Soccer Specials:

● **Frank Lampard and Michael Owen** – I don't care who puts it in, you can both score round at my place!??! Geddit???!??

● **Rio Ferdinand** – OK, so you take drugs!!??? We've all got our little weaknesses – and mine is you!!??! Mmmmmmm!!!!??

● **Roman Abramovich** – I like the look of your money, comrade!!!? And it buys you success round at Auntie Glenda's!!???!?

Dos Vidanyaaaa!!!!!

(That's Russian for Byeeeee, stoopid!)

HOW SOLVING AFRICA'S PROBLEMS HAS CHANGED

19th century

Lord Palmerston

21st century

Tony Blair

KENT Police have confirmed that 90 searches were carried out around Leeds Castle during the summit.

The searches were carried out under section 44 of the Provision of Terrorism Act, *Kent Messenger*

THE LIFE OF DR JONATHAN

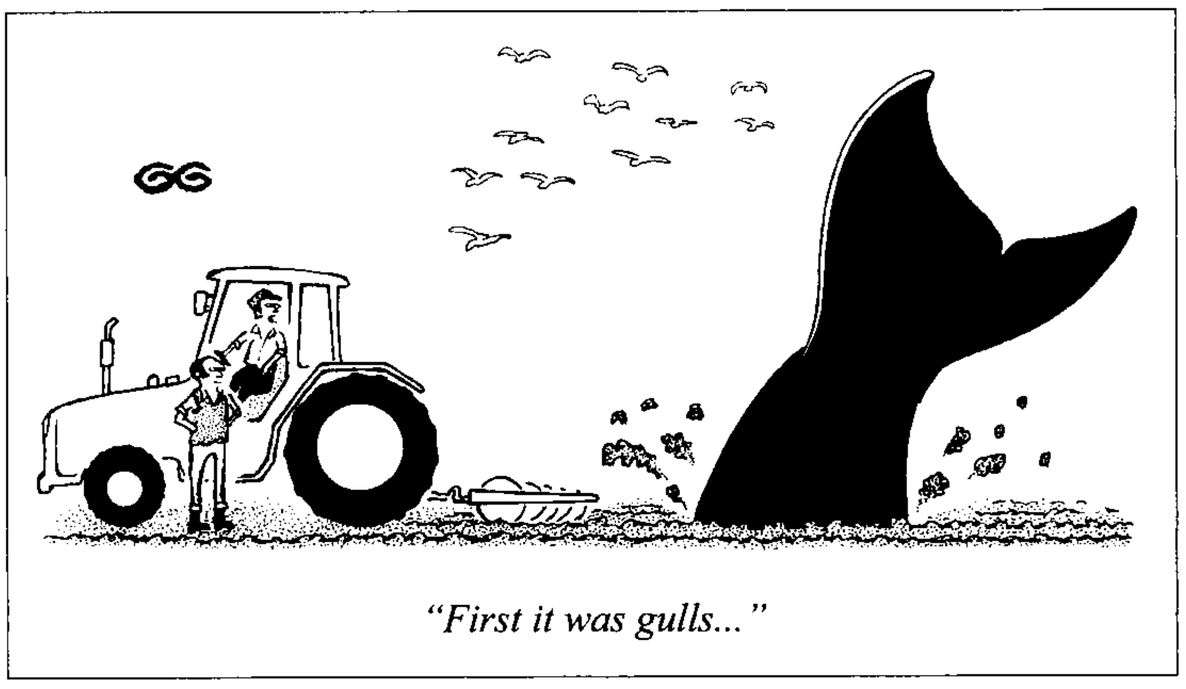
By His Devoted Disciple James Boswell

I called upon my friend and mentor Dr Jonathan at his lodgings in Charlotte Street to learn of his new project, to wit, a Compendium of Disbelief, to be transmitted via Mr Logie Baird's televisual device. I found the good doctor surrounded by the great savants of our age, namely Professor Dawkins from the ancient University of Oxenforde and Dame Toynbee, the celebrated blue-stocking.

Boswell: Surely you are not disputing that there must be a benevolent superior being, one fully cogniscent with all human knowledge, who surveys the world from a position of omniscience, and who mere mortals cannot comprehend?

Dr Jonathan *(smiling)*: Indeed, sir, 'tis myself.

(Ends)



"First it was gulls..."

PIG DENIES 'SEXUAL RELATIONS' WITH REBECCA LOOS

by our Agricultural Staff
PHIL TEST-TUBE

A FURIOUS pig today strongly denied claims by celebrity slapper Rebecca Loos that she had "pleasured" him in a sty during an afternoon of passion.

"I am a happily married pig", he told reporters, "and I love my wife and piglets very much. I even have a tattoo of young Pinky on my back." He continued: "Do I look like the sort of pig who would have to get his thrills with the likes of Rebecca Loos?"

Pig in a Poke

But last night a spokesman for Rebecca Loos, Mr Max Clifford, said: "My client stands by her story. She and the pig had an intense relationship lasting several minutes and I've got the pictures to prove it."

David Beckham is 28.

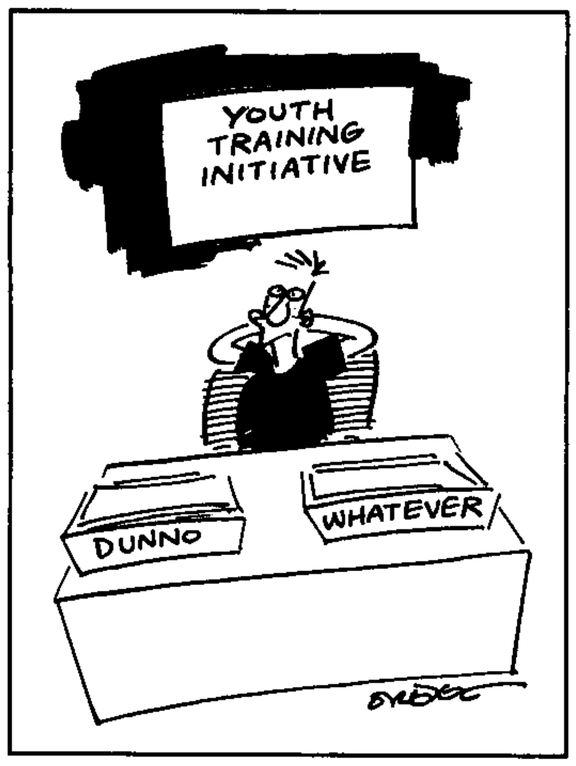
THE Sun SAYS

HOW LOW can television stoop showing scenes of disgusting bestiality between a woman and a pig that have never before been screened in Britain.

If you haven't seen them turn to pages 2,3,4,5,6 and 7 to see exactly how revolting and depraved these amazing pictures really are!

PLUS

Your chance to win a posh night out with Britain's sexiest pig **p.8**



POETRY CORNER

Lines on the retirement of Michael Fish, meteorologist

So. Farewell then
Michael Fish.
Famous for forecasting
The weather
For 30 years.

Your most celebrated
Prediction of course
Was that there would
Not be
A hurricane.

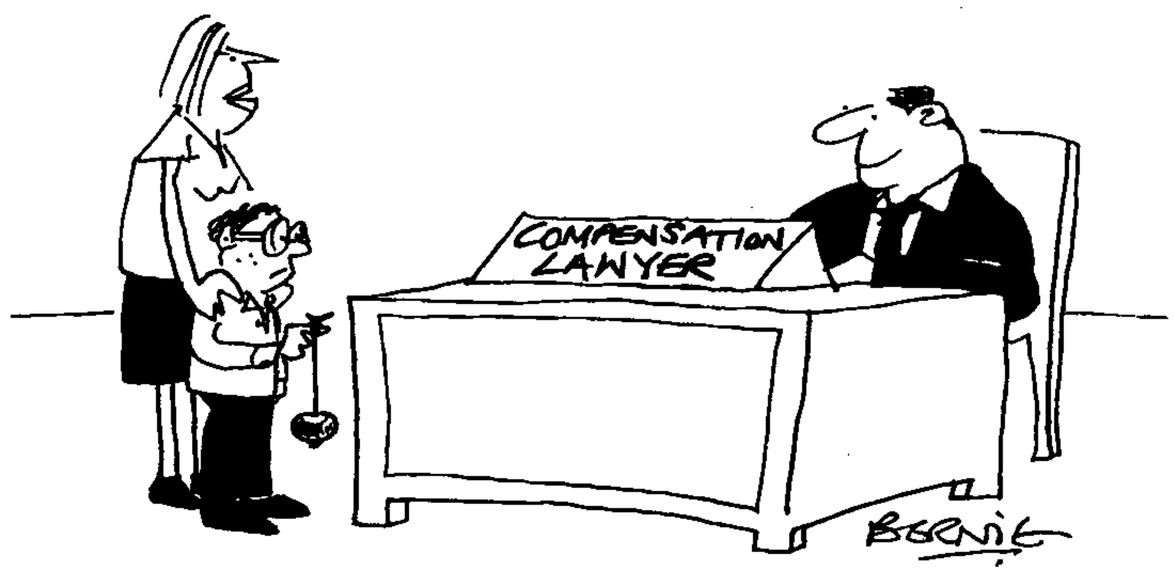
But there was.

So can we believe you
When you predict
Your imminent
Retirement?

We might turn on
The news and find
You are still
There.

E.J. Thribb (17½ – or 93° Fahrenheit)

The Daily Telegraph
Parents & Education
Scolarships
Editorial and advertising feature
– Saturday, October 23
The Daily Telegraph



"His safety goggles are too tight"

MANDY – THE TOAST OF BRUSSELS

That Astonishing Speech In Full

Bonjour matelots d'Europe!

Je suis 'Mandy', le plus fameux medicin de spin du monde.

Mais, ça c'est histoire.

Maintenant, je suis Mandy l'Européan!

Mandy, qui aime les croissants et le sauerkraut et les legendaire sprouts de Bruxelles!

Au Monsieur Blair et Madame Cherie je dis 'au revoir'!

Salut à Président Chirac et Chancellor Kohl et tous les autres, les noms de qui je ne souviens pas au moment! *(Consults notes)*

Ah, oui, et aussi salut à mon nouveau colleague, Président Barroso de Portugal!

Serieusement, mon agenda en Bruxelles est très simple!

A bas la corruption! A bas le sleaze! A bas la Grande Bretagne!

Vive l'Europe! Vive l'euro!

Vive moi-même!

Souvenez mon motto legendaire, 'Je ne suis pas un quitter, je suis un combatant!'

(An edited version of the new Trade Commissioner's address to the European Parliament can be read on the website www.mandyandreinaldogotobrussels.eu.int)

EUPHEMISMS: Making an appointment

He's not French | **He's French** | **You are an uninspiring Mittel-European non-entity**

My eBay

EC rider (145,590)

Items I'm Bidding On (1-3 of 3 items)

	Current Price	Postage Cost	Bids
☐ **De luxe Belgian gravy boat – gilt rubbed away (twice-fired, slightly crazed)**	£149.99	£20.00	1
☐ **Fancy bentwood backscratcher – odd curio**	£14.99	£3.00	1
☐ **'Il Principe' by Machiavelli – dual language edition**	£2.99	£1.50	1

Items I'm Selling (1 of 1 items)

	Current Price	Postage Cost	Bids
☐ **Video – 'Notting Hill' – low price, great saving**	£4.99	£2.50	0

Exclusive to all newspapers

John Kerry
An Apology

IN RECENT weeks, in common with all other newspapers, we may have given the impression that John Kerry stood no chance of ever becoming the US President, as the American electorate cared little about his impressive Vietnam War record and found his cold aloof nature, dry speech patterns and obsession with facts and figures offputting, preferring instead the simple folksy appeal of President Bush.

We now realise in the light of the polls that followed the recent US presidential debates that nothing could be further from the truth and that the American electorate, impressed by Kerry's war record, is increasingly drawn to his carefully measured statesmanlike delivery and his impressive command of facts and figures, in stark contrast to the embarrassingly folksy posturings of President Bush.

We apologise for any confusion caused, and for any confusion in the future should the polls show Bush back in the lead and we lambast Kerry for being too cold, aloof, and etc. etc. etc.

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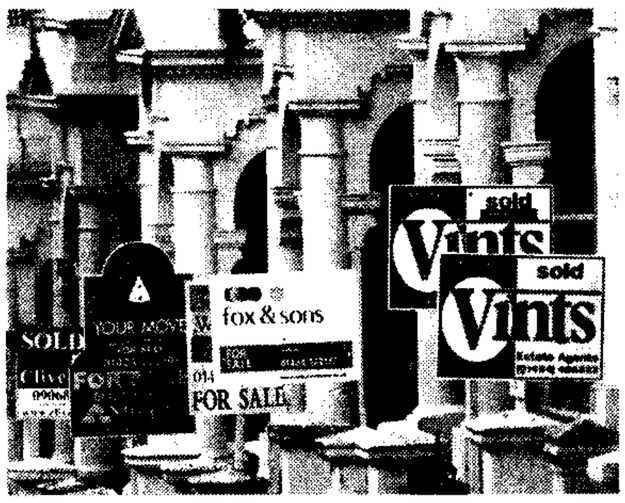
Daily Mail

HOUSING MARKET CERTAIN TO CRASH



THE CLEAREST indication yet that Britain's housing market was about to crash was given yesterday when Tony Blair purchased a £3.6 million townhouse in London's exclusive Connaught Square.

"The Prime Minister's reckless and wholly unjustifiable decision to buy a house spells certain misery for millions of houseowners up and down the country," said one well-placed Daily Mail editor. "Within days, as a direct result of Blair's decision, house prices will have tumbled over 100% and people's homes will be worth less than the small change down the back of their sofa.

"Only one person can be held responsible for the total and utter destruction of the housing market and the resulting end of civilisation as we know it, and that's Tony Blair."

RUMSFELD —NEW LINK CLAIM

THE American Secretary of Defense Mr Donald Rumsfeld yesterday admitted that there was no link between himself and the truth.

"I have seen no evidence," he said, "to connect anything I say with the reality of what is actually happening."

He quoted as an example his claim that there was a link between Saddam Hussein and the terrorist organisation Al Qaeda.

"That claim was hogwash," he said. "I was lying. You can't trust anything I say."

He later retracted this statement, saying "When I said I was lying, I was in fact lying. As indeed I am now. I hope that makes it clear."

That Iraq Honours List In Full

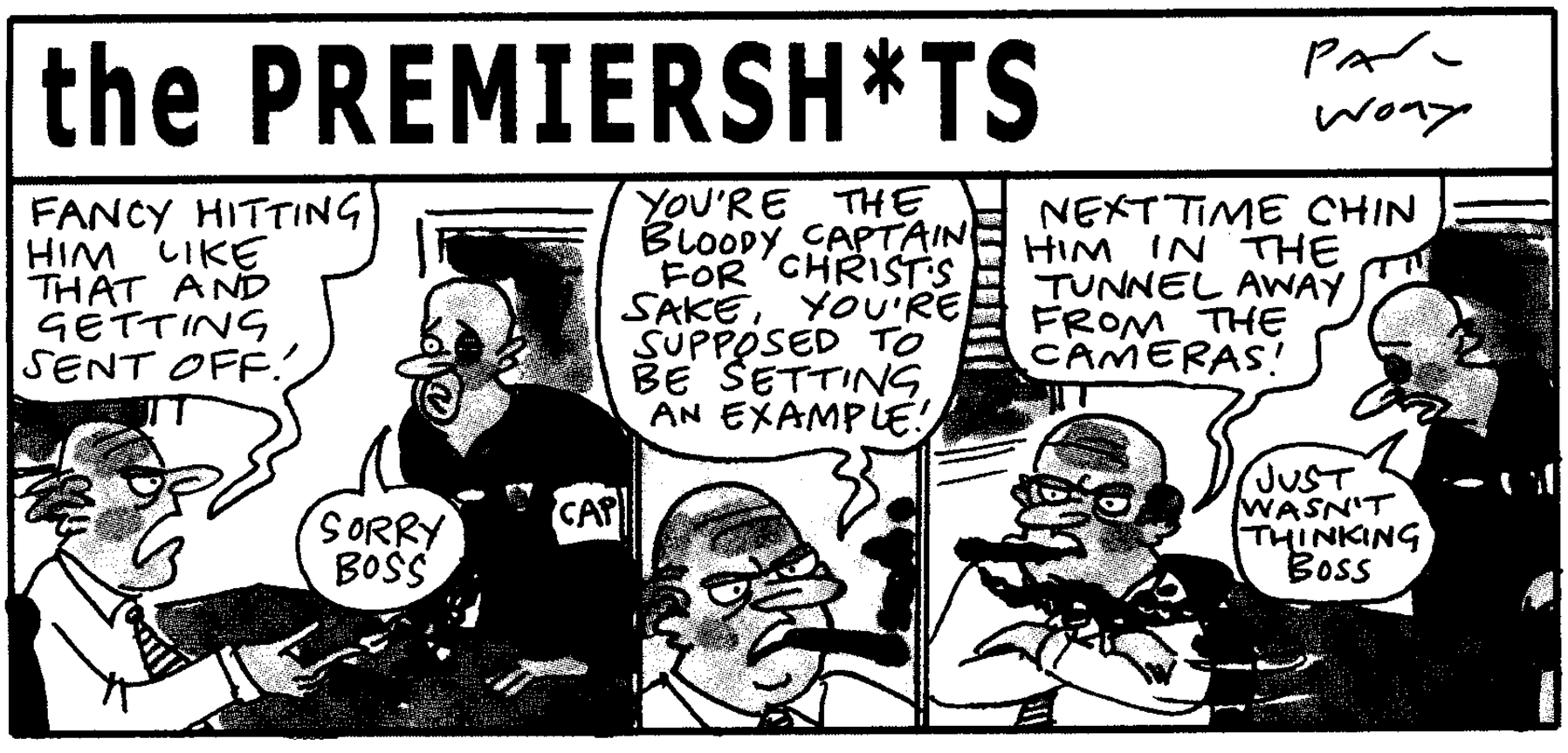
(cont. from page one)

Order of the Whitewash
Lord Hutton, First Class
Lord Butler, Second Class

The Companion of Dishonour
Mr Alastair Campbell; Mr John Scarlett; Mr Geoffrey Hoon; Mr Jack Straw; Mr Jonathon Powell; The Conservative Party.

The Iraq Cross
Field Marshall Sir Anthony Blair VC, DSO, etc *(That's enough Gongs, Ed).*

the PREMIERSH*TS


PAUL WOOZ
FANCY HITTING HIM LIKE THAT AND GETTING SENT OFF.'
SORRY BOSS
CAP
YOU'RE THE BLOODY CAPTAIN FOR CHRIST'S SAKE, YOU'RE SUPPOSED TO BE SETTING AN EXAMPLE!
NEXT TIME CHIN HIM IN THE TUNNEL AWAY FROM THE CAMERAS!
JUST WASN'T THINKING BOSS

ME AND MY SPOON

THIS WEEK

CHERIE BLAIR

Are there any particular types of spoons that you and Tony prefer?

If you are referring to the Prime Minister, I have made it a firm rule that I am never, under any circumstances, prepared to talk about our private life together, and that applies as much to spoons as it does to anything else.

Your friend Carole Caplin has said that spoons can have healing properties when they are pointed in the direction of certain Inca holistic sites. Would you agree?

I've made it a firm rule that I am never, under any circumstances, prepared to talk about my private life, and that applies just as much to my relationship with Carole Caplin as it does to what spoons Tony uses to stir his coffee – which, incidentally, is decaffeinated these days and sugar-free, so he doesn't need a spoon anyway. Okay?

Mrs Blair, you said that you would only agree to do this interview if we turned it into a plug for your new book 'The Spoons of Downing Street'. Wasn't there an amusing story about Lady Dorothy Macmillan, President de Gaulle and a soup spoon that was by mistake left in the fridge?

I've no idea – I didn't write that bit.

When you move to Connaught Square, will you take your spoons with you, or will you be buying new ones?

That question is off-limits for the purposes of this interview.

Has anything amusing ever happened to you in connection with a spoon?

You will be hearing from my solicitors.

NEXT WEEK: *Jeremy Irons, 'Me And My Irons'*

THAT TORY CONFERENCE IN FULL

ALL YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THE NEW-LOOK TORIES

'I'M NOT PROMISING ANYTHING,' Promises Howard

by Our Political Staff **MICHAEL GETUPANDGOVE**

IN AN astonishing break with tradition, Tory leader Michael Howard won a 2-hour standing ovation from the Tory delegates (Sid and Doris Johnson) when he promised that he would not be making any promises.

"People are fed up with politicians standing up and telling them that they are going to do this, that and the other," said Mr Howard.

"Well, let me tell you," he said, to resounding cheers, "I'm not that kind of politician!

"And I think the British public will respect the fact that I haven't got anything to say to them!"

As Mr Howard's speech faded to its climax, the hall was filled with the strains of Elgar's funeral elegy Nimby (Not In My Lifetime).

As the coffin of the Tory Party slid gently out of sight behind a curtain, the small group of mourners agreed that the cause of death had been a lethal attack of IDS.

'OF COURSE I'D LIKE TO CUT TAXES, BUT I CAN'T PROMISE ANYTHING,' Says Letwin

THE Shadow Chancellor Mr Oliver Nitwit gave a firm pledge to Conference that he would not promise any tax cuts.

"I think the public will respect me for this," he told cheering delegates (Sid and Maurice Saatchi).

"They don't want politicians coming to stand up and tell them what they're going to do."

"Quite rightly, no one would believe them," said Mr Letslose. "We Tories have the humility to say that we've no idea what we're going to do, and there's no reason why anyone should vote for us.

"And that must be good news for Britain," he concluded, as the hall filled with the strains of Elgar's Pomp And Twit March No. 4.

CONFERENCE DIARY with I-Spy

■ Spotted buying a copy of the Daily Telegraph – none other than Ann Widdecombe! "I'm going to read it later," she confided to me!

■ Who should I see walking along the seafront but none other than Sir Malcolm Rifkind! Was he thinking about the day when he might become the next Tory leader?

■ One of the best-kept Conference secrets – what colour shoes is Theresa May planning to wear at tomorrow's big Kwikfit cocktail party? A little bird tells me that they could just be black! Watch this space!

■ Guess what! The temperature in Bournemouth yesterday, according to the Grand Hotel's own weather station, was 64 degrees – exactly the same as the percentage of delegates who think that Mr Howard is doing a good job as leader. Spooky, eh?

■ Seen lunching yesterday at Bournemouth's swankiest restaurant, the Grand Hotel Grill, none other than Nick Soames and his friend 'Fatty' Hesketh. And what was on the menu? You've guessed it, lobster thermidor!

(That's enough fascinating Conference titbits. Ed.)

'FEWER SPEED CAMERAS COULD MEAN MORE,' Pledges Yeo

IN A refreshing break with tradition, Mr Tim Yeo told delegates (Sid and Morris Minor) that on Day One of the next government he would act to crack down on the menace of speed cameras.

"If I find," he said, "that there are too many speed cameras, I shall have no hesitation in removing them.

"If, on the other hand," he continued, "I find that there are not enough cameras, I give a firm pledge to Conference that I will install a lot more.

"I think the public will respect me for not knowing what I am going to do and for not making any promises that I cannot keep, unlike Tony Blair!"

At the mention of the Prime Minister's name, the entire audience (Doris, Boris and Maurice Johnson) broke into a spontaneous round of booing and hissing, accompanied by the sound of hunting horns.

'I CAN'T PROMISE NOT TO STAND FOR LEADER,' Pledges David Davis

SHADOW Home Secretary David Davis told conference that the British public would respect him for not promising to knife Michael Howard in the back when he lost the election and *(cont. p. 94)*

That Post-Election Tory Timetable For Action

Day One

Admit that you have lost the election.

Week One

Hold leadership election.

Month One

Acclaim new leader as saviour of party.

Year Four

Lose next election *(and repeat).*

Funniest Joke Of The Conference

Overheard at fringe meeting: "How many of Tony's cronies does it take to change a light bulb?"

Answer: None, because they never change anything, they just promise to (unlike Mr Howard!).

THOSE NEW COOL TORIES

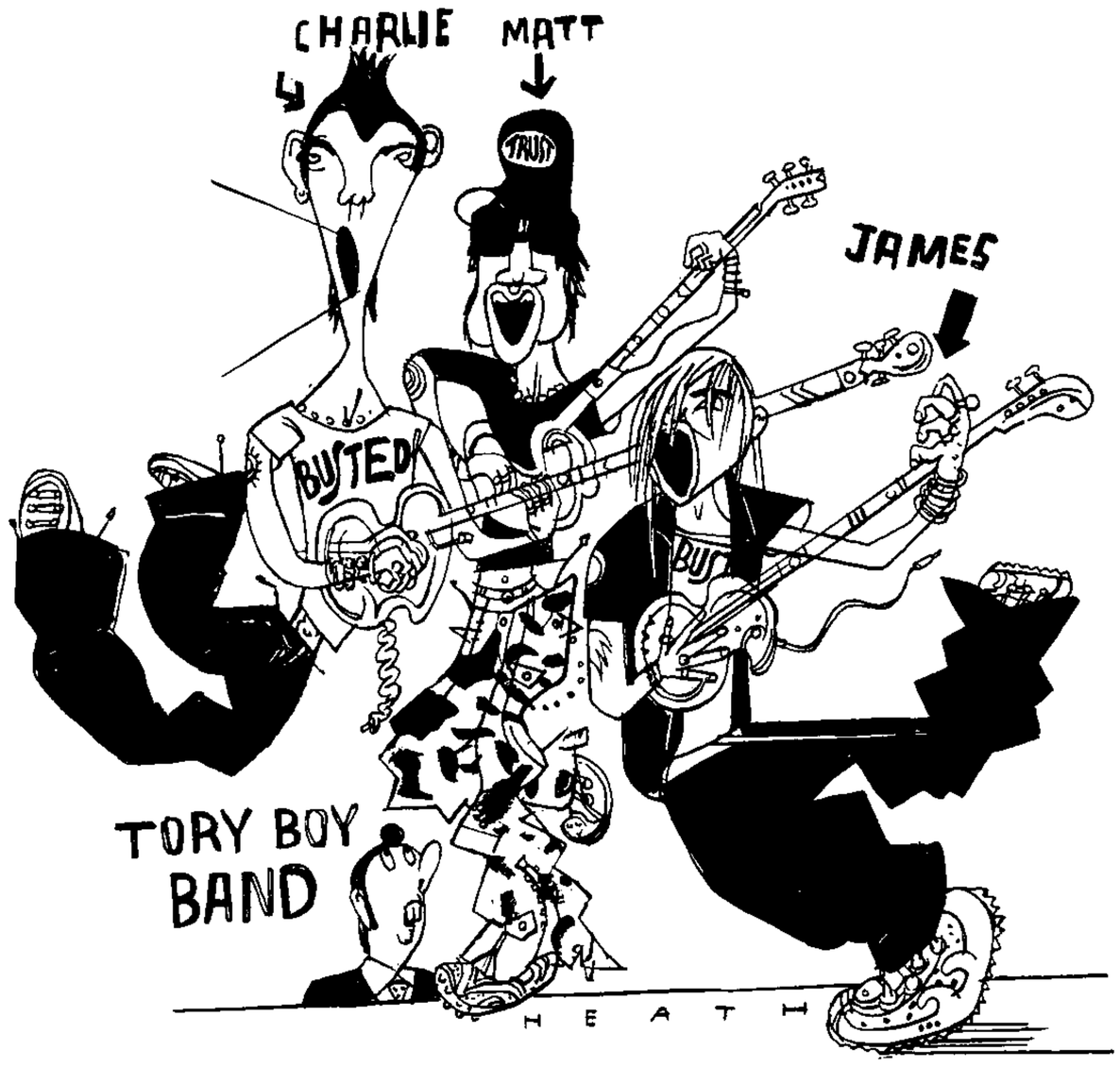
By Michael Stevenson

THE LEADING lights of the shadow cabinet last night revealed a side of themselves that the public seldom sees, when they answered the question "What was the last CD you bought?".

Michael Howard: What I've been told to say is that I'm very keen on this new group Busted. Is that how you pronounce it? That one really grabs me, Daddy-o!

John Redwood: I've been told to say that I really dig the Scissors Sisters. Apparently, they're like, wow!

Sir Nicholas Soames: I'm a huge fan of Meatloaf! I had it at luncheon today with Lord Hesketh. I must tell the secretary to get it put on the menu at my club. It goes down a treat with four dozen oysters and a few bottles of port.



WHY WE SAY THAT BORIS IS THE MAN TO LEAD THE PARTY

by **Sir Max Hastings**, **Anthony Howard** and everyone else

LET's face it – the Tory Party is doomed, unless it can find someone to lead who the public can recognise.

They need a man about whom they can say, "Look, isn't that the bloke off the telly?"

Only then can it be said that the Tory Party has entered the 21st Century.

That is why the only man for the job is TV celebrity Robert Kilroy-Silk.

© *Hastingstrash Productions 2004.*

★THE CHINESE MORNING DAILY★

Friday October 8th

GREAT LEADER TO STAY AND THEN GO

AUTHORITIES in Britain have promised a peaceful handover of power following the announcement by the father of the nation Deng ZioBlair that he will only serve one more term in office.

However the leadership aspirations of several middle ranging officials within the highly secretive New Labour party organisation suggest that a bitter power struggle to succeed Deng ZioBlair, the leader responsible for taking the Country on the 'small leap sideways', may now ensue.

Chinese Communist Party leaders have repeatedly called for more openness in British politics and an end of the repressive one party New Labour state.

Court Circular

HOLYROOD
Her Majesty the Queen today opened the new Scottish Parliament and formally presented the £431 billion bill to representatives of the taxpayer. During the traditional "Taking Everyone For a Riding" Ceremony, the procession was formed as follows:

1st Carriage

Her Majesty the Queen; Mr Jack McNumptie, First Minister; Lord Macallan of Glenfiddich, Keeper of the Wee Dram

2nd Carriage

The Duke of Edinburgh; Dame Kirsty Newsnight of That Wark

1st Aston Martin

His Royal Highness Sir Sean Connery, Laird of the Clan Bond

1st Lorry-load of Wasted Money

Mr Rab C. Nesbitt (Driver)

(That's enough procession. Ed)

POETRY CORNER

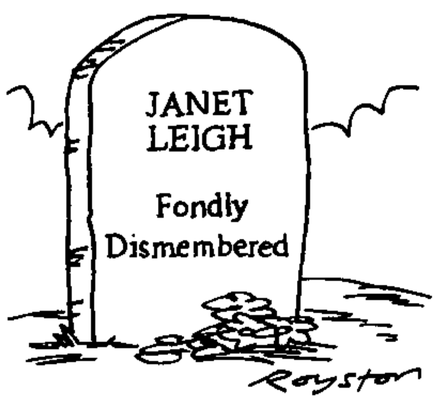
In memoriam Janet Leigh, film actress

So. Farewell then
Janet Leigh,
Famous for the
Shower scene in
Psycho.

A-a-a-a-a-a-a-a-a-a-
a-a-a-a-a-a-a-a-a-a-
a-a-a-a-a-a-a-a-a-rghhh!

That was your
Catchphrase.

E.J. Thribb (17½)



THE NIGHTMARE SCENARIO THAT JUSTIFIED THE INVASION OF IRAQ

by Jack Straw

SO, the truth is out. The weapons inspectors' latest report has at last revealed just how close the world came to Armageddon thanks to Saddam Hussein's weapons of mass destruction.

OK, he didn't have any. But the reality was much more frightening.

If Saddam had decided to develop these weapons, which he didn't, and had the money to do so, which he hadn't, then he could, within a matter of only 45 years, have initiated terrifying programmes of the type that didn't exist to produce devastating nuclear, chemical and biological megadeath missiles which, if they were launched on launchers of the type they didn't have, would have laid waste the entire planet, allowing Saddam to conquer the world and run it as an Islamic superstate in collaboration with hostile alien insect life forms who would land in the West to harvest all the remaining human beings to feed their dying planet Kreuxxl in the Zebulon sector of Andromeda Five... Excuse me, I think I had better go and lie down.

© *Jack Straw 2004.*

Was Prince Harry Given Help In His Art 'A' Level?

You Decide

Harry's Final Coursework Project *(Grade B)*

BILLY CONNOLLY DIES HORRIBLY

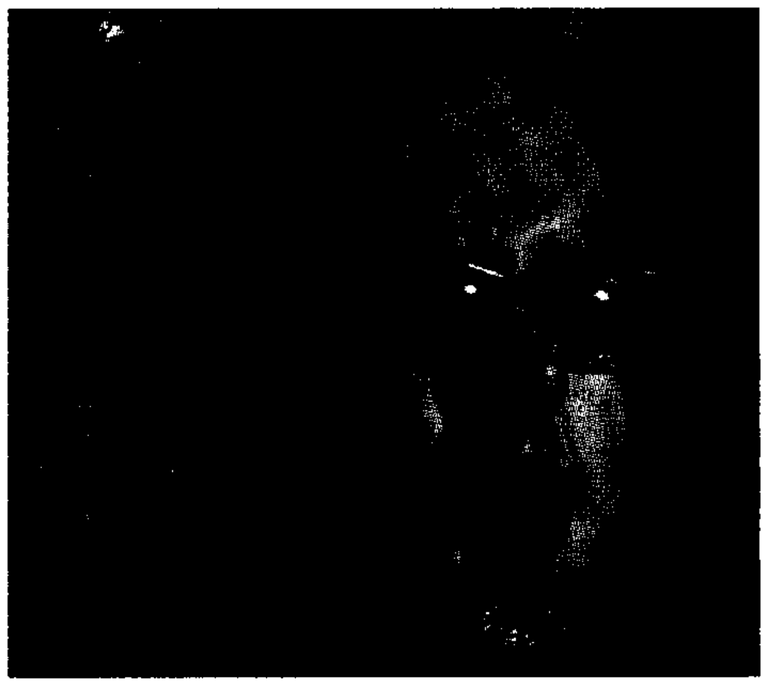
by Our Showbiz Staff

THE 62-year-old comedian Mr Billy Connolly, a former shipyard worker, last night died horribly on stage at the Apollo Theatre after making a joke about British hostage Ken Bigley.

A video of Mr Connolly's last moments in showbusiness was posted on the internet and showed a silver-haired Scotsman pleading for his professional life. His family said, "He had simply gone to the theatre to try and make some money. It's a tragedy".

ROY of the TAKEOVERS
MELCHESTER UNITED IS ABOUT TO BE SOLD TO AN AMERICAN TYCOON
HOW CAN YOU DO THIS? THINK OF THE HISTORY! THINK OF THE TRADITION
YOU'RE RIGHT ROY — THE HISTORY OF MERCHANDISING AND THE TRADITION OF RIPPING OFF THE FANS
WE SHOULD DOUBLE THE PRICE!
WE'RE THE BASTARDS IN THE BLACK!
FINANCIAL GOAL!
BACK OF THE NET PROFIT!
COOPER

DIARY



SIR ELTON JOHN

That "SIR" before my name still makes me come over all queer (whoops – been at the gin again, mother!). As I said to my old mate Parky in one of my comedy voices when I topped the bill (no other guests, look at the contract, mate) on his show the other day, "Ooh-arr, Mike" I said, "It's been a right old journey, that it has!"

That got a gi-mungus laugh from the studio audience, it really did. They always love seeing me as this average bloke, loves his football, loves his pint, loves a bit of a giggle – but, let's face it, an average bloke who's been blessed with a huge god-given talent.

Happy memories! I'll never forget the day I was called to the Palace to collect my gong from the Queen (ooh, sounds kinda naughty, bad boy, big smacky-smacks for Little Elt!! – just kidding!)

We were all lined up in this great big gold hall at Buckingham Palace, and I don't mind admitting I was feeling kinda nervous, and it was a little bit chilly in there. So then my name was called, and I walked up the red carpet, and there was the Queen waiting for me at the end with her sword and everything, and it was all really lovely.

And I'm just kneeling there and the Queen, bless her, is saying a few words to me ("Have you come far?"), when I begin to feel a bit of a draught breezing round my ankles. I do my best to ignore it – after all, it's not every day you're invited to the Palace! – but this draught really begins to get on my nerves, and I truly can't afford to catch a chill. So the Queen is just asking me whether I write all my own songs when the draught really begins to bite and I'm thinking something has got to be done about this bloody great draught and then the Queen asks me whether I just sing or whether I play a musical instrument too and the draught's bloody gale force 8 by now and I can't take it any more and I shout, "Were you born in a fucking barn? Can someone shut that fucking door! There's a howling fucking snow storm in here and I'm getting my fucking tits frozen off! You're the most fifth-rate fucking outfit I've ever fucking come across in my fucking life! Someone get me fucking out of here! That's positively the last fucking time I agree to come to this fucking dive – you're all a load of fucking wankers! What does a girl have to do to keep warm around here? Have you never heard of central fucking heating?" And then I stalk back to my seat.

The rest of the reception goes pretty well, good food, nice wine, bit of a chin-wag with my mate Prince Andrew, all very posh, dontcha know? Nothing more is said about the draught, which is just good manners, really. After all, I've told them once, and I'm not going to tell them again.

Nelson Mandela is one bloke I hugely admire. I can't imagine being locked up in a cell for literally days on end without a personal assistant or even face-cream. I wrote a song about Nelly's time in prison – "It's Those Little Things I Miss So Bad" – and I was truly privileged to sing it at a concert in his honour:

"Larked up in jay-ul
'Cos my skin's not pay-ul
Yits those lit-tul thungs I myiss swooo bad –
Thwose lit-tul things
That Santa brings
Like dia-mond riiiings
An' pure gold wiiiings
An' thwose pearl yearrings I once had"

When I finished singing this soulful tribute, I glanced over at the great man, and believe me the guy was in tears.

Afterwards, I attended a ceremony at which Nelson Mandela was going to give a bit back to society by present yours truly with an honorary degree. It was indeed a marvellous moment as I queued behind The Bee Gees to receive my honorary degree from this giant of a woman, Little Miss Mandela, truly a legend in her own lifetime.

I waited until Barry and Robin had finally finished telling the world how brilliant they were, but then when I got up on stage something snapped.

"Congratulations, Sir Elton," said Mandela, handing me my certificate. And at that moment I saw red.

"The Bee Gees? Sorry – but fuck off! They sound like fucking hamsters being strangled! Just tell me, who gives a fuck about the squeaky Bee Fucking Gees – and anyway one of them's not even alive anymore, so it's high fucking time they knocked a third off their concerts if anyone can be arsed to see them anymore. But see if I give a toss. It's a bloody disgrace!"

But the rest of the ceremony went like a dream-o-roso, and I'm told that Barry and Robin later apologised for their behaviour – so no hard feelings towards them, I'm bigger than that.

Underneath it all, I'm just a regular bloke. It doesn't take much to make me happy. As I said to Miss Michele Parky the last time I starred on her show, all I need to make me happy is to watch my mates at Watford playing like angels on a Saturday afternoon.

Take last Saturday, f'rinstance. Watford at home – magic! So I get to my seat in the Executive Stand ten minutes before kick-off. Per-fect-i-onay! A seat in the stand at Watford – that's my recipe for happiness, Michael!

But then – whaddayaknow? – it all starts to spiral out of control into a hideous nightmare. First, where's my fucking cushion? Nowhere! Someone fucking forgot it! And it doesn't stop there. Five minutes to kick-off, and it drizzles. So I phone through to my LA office and tell them to do something about the fucking drizzle sharpish. Two minutes to go, and I look round and see a whole stadium full of complete fucking strangers. I'm sorry, I was led to believe this was a private match, who the hell let them in? Little Miss Jesus! And who said they could stuff their faces with fucking burgers? Give me a break!

That's it, I'm not taking this, that's the last time I support Watford! And where's my shawl? Someone forgot my fucking shawl! And where are the lilies I fucking ordered? I asked for fucking lilies all the way round the fucking pitch! That's it! I've had enough! Bring me my fucking car?!

In the end it was a two-all draw. We should never have let in that second goal, Michael.

Still, can't complain.

As told to
CRAIG BROWN

Celeb

FOR ME, MOBILE BLOODY PHONES ARE ONE OF THE CURSES OF THE MODERN AGE, JOHNSON...
EVERYWHERE I GO, THERE'S PEOPLE USING THEIR MOBILES... AND DO THEY ASK IF ANYONE MINDS?
NEVER.
ON THE STREETS, IN SHOPS, IN PUBS, RESTAURANTS... YOU CAN'T GET AWAY FROM THEM...
OOH LOOK IT'S GARY THINGY!
CLICK
CLICK
EVERYONE'S A BLOODY PAPARAZZO THESE DAYS!

● *On sale now – Craig Brown's "Imaginary Friends". Call 0870 750 1712 or order online at www.private-eye.co.uk* ●

Literary Review

Culture clubbed

Where Have All the Intellectuals Gone? Confronting 21st Century Philistinism

Frank Furedi

(Continuum, £12.99)

THE arguments peddled by this doggedly written little book will be familiar to anyone who has ever browsed impressionably in the education pages of the *Daily Telegraph*, the *Times Literary Supplement's* "Notebook" or the less arid stretches of the *London Review of Books*.

Pitched at "the many intelligent men and women who aspire to a more challenging intellectual and cultural life", it undertakes to analyse the wide-scale "institutional dumbing down" that currently afflicts every part of the cultural fabric, from the university system and the public libraries to the pronouncements of the mandarins charged with their smooth running.

The key word in this gloomy conspectus of "the banalization of cultural life" – Furedi is a sociology professor, so there are plenty of horror phrases of this kind – is *inclusiveness*. Authority the western world over has decreed that everyone has to be encouraged to participate in everything, and that "creativity" stirs in every human breast. Anything difficult or abstruse or environmentally forbidding has to be rendered universally accessible, with the result that libraries have turned into the equivalent of motorway service stations, museums been stuffed full of "interactive" exhibitions of the "ordinary" and universities opened up to students who can't be expected to write essays because it might make them feel uncomfortable.

All this is, on the one hand, highly patronising to the "ordinary" people it purports to help, as it takes their innate stupidity as a given; and on the other hugely unfair to those of us who think a library should be stocked with books rather than pop CDs, however grave the risk of lowering "the self-esteem of the excluded".

The problem, according to Furedi, is exacerbated by what he calls the "professionalization of intellectual life" (all the brain boxes turned into craven academic lackeys scurrying for funding) and the intrusive hand of the "market" which makes knowledge a commodity to be bought and sold like anything else.

There is, of course, nothing startlingly original in these laments, although it's good to see some of the fatuities spouted by government arts ministers pinned down for ever on the page: Baroness Blackstone, for example, seems to see the arts as the spiritual equivalent of prune juice and could be found telling an audience at the Cheltenham Festival of Literature that there was "no doubt" they could be useful in "improving health outcomes".

The peculiarity of this assault on the levelling down of our cultural life is that it comes not from the outraged traditional right but from the guilt-obsessed left. Furedi's real villains, you feel, are the post-modern cultural relativists who from the 1960s onward went around proclaiming that knowledge was a social construct and that all individual experiences were equally valid.

Several brakes should, however, be applied to this careening vehicle as it slides downhill towards the thoroughly deserving target of the secretary of state for education, Charles Clarke. The first is that people have been making these complaints for centuries, from Carlyle and Matthew Arnold in the 19th to Mrs Leavis gnashing her teeth over working class cinema goers in the 20th. Practically every civilised man in history has thought his own age a kind of sink of debasement compared to the decent usages of the age before.

The second is that, however much the market may help this movement along, in the end it offers a way out. Only last week the president of Trinity College, Oxford, could be found warning the government that any further attempt to fix university entrance in favour of state school applicants with inferior qualifications would end up with the university taking steps to privatise itself.

The third – and the book's underlying flaw – is the mysterious assumption that what we need to redress this imbalance is more "intellectuals". Looking at the role played by these persons in the cultural and political life of the 20th century – all those superannuated 30s schoolboys sucking up to Stalin, F.R. Leavis grimly refashioning English literature in his own image – you might think that the supposedly iconic figure of Raymond Williams with his lies about the Spanish Civil War was the last person we needed to expose the ghastly waste of public money that is the department for culture, media and sport. "A culture war against the philistines is long overdue," Prof Furedi belligerently concludes. So it is, but we need better leaders than this.

Making a Bob

Chronicles, Volume One

Bob Dylan

(Simon & Schuster, £16.99)

EVER since Bob Dylan's 1971 free-verse ensemble *Tarantula* turned out to be as easily decipherable as tea leaves, Dylanites have been lusting after some meaningful footnotes to the albums they adore. But now, in one epochal week, we get the first part of the autobiography published simultaneously with the *Complete Lyrics*. The idea, as the publishers would have it, is that here's a manual explain the magic, and so at last the enigma can be laid to rest.

We know, however, that Dylan has always embellished his own myth. He admits as much early on in *Chronicles*, telling how he fed the head of publicity at Columbia Records "pure hokum – hophead talk" in a bid to make the right impression. Poet and prophet Dylan may well be, but even the greatest artists have to have some craft about them, and he readily confesses to spinning yarns and spreading rumours when he has had to.

So how much Dylan is revealing in *Chronicles*, as opposed to how much he is performing, is hard to sift. It's made even harder by the book's splintered structure. It may be titled *Volume One* but Dylan is not born, Tristram Shandy-like, until page 28, midway through a pot of lyrical recollections of New York in the late 50s. Then we cut to the recording of *New Morning* in 1970, and *Oh Mercy* in 1987. And then it's back to the early days to finish at the start.

No one says that an autobiography has to be rigidly chronological, nor does it even have to make sense. But we know that there are more volumes to come, and it is convenient, therefore, that volume one is self-consciously a fragment of a bigger picture, with the remaining parts soon to be available in all good bookshops.

For Dylan fans what's really of interest are the whys and wherefores beneath the songs. On this point, he is even more opaque than on his own history; unable, as you might expect, to pin down small epiphanies in words. On the lyrical content itself there is next to nothing, except to say that he never saw himself as the social revolutionary his acolytes wanted him to be and that he needs "to hear things plain and simple in the King's English."

This, in short, is a disaster. Not for ordinary readers, but for the academics and Bob-ophiles always truffling for exegesis. The songs? "They came out of the blue." Folk music, "exceeds all human understanding". Dylan recognises that a visionary – and particularly a visionary in need of a pension – must remain elliptical and abstruse, else the sort of people who gorge themselves on books like this will lose interest.

In fact, all Dylan reveals is that he cares little for the intricacies of prosody and semiotics, or the eggheads' "quacky interpretations of my songs"; he is much more concerned with his family. "What did I owe the rest of the world? Nothing. Not a damn thing. The press? I figured you lie to it. In reality I was imperceptible." And imperceptible he remains.

Not that an impenetrable narrator means a worthless book; in fact Dylan comes across as engagingly droll. His writing is gritty and rhythmical, delivered in a Chandler-esque drawl and pock-marked with singular slang. Sometimes he's even more entertaining than perhaps he means to be – many of the anecdotes about how Bleedin' Spleen McGuire teamed up with Tex Van Git down the legendary Carburettor Club to play "I gorn lost my mama's diddley" veer close to parody.

What *Chronicles* is defiantly *not*, however, is what the literary critics hoped it would be – an answer. Dylan himself puts it best. Talking about a record producer, he says: "I know that he wanted to understand me more as we went along, but you can't do puzzles." To many people, his studied inscrutability would be a reason not to bother with vols 2,3 and 4. To the others, they must just like doing puzzles.

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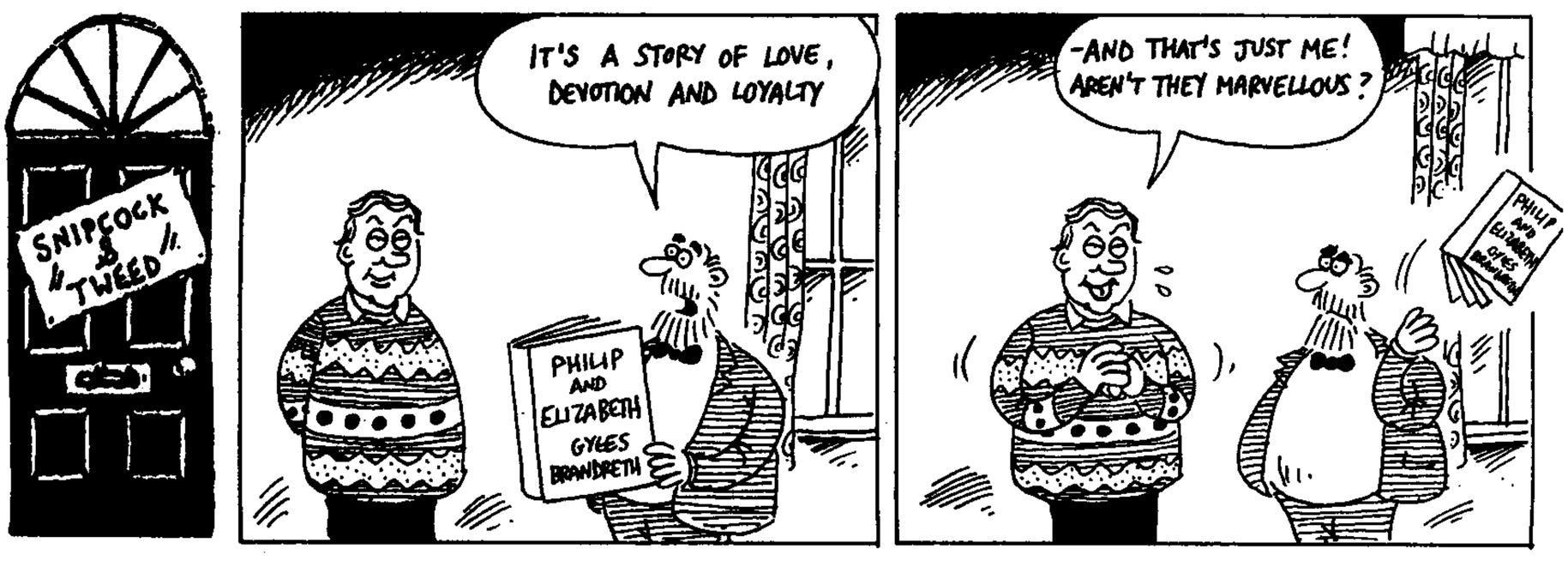
Grauniad


SNIPCOCK & TWEED
IT'S A STORY OF LOVE, DEVOTION AND LOYALTY
PHILIP AND ELIZABETH GYLES BRANDRETH
-AND THAT'S JUST ME! AREN'T THEY MARVELLOUS?
PHILIP AND ELIZABETH GYLES BRANDRETH

BOOKS & BOOKMEN

■ SHOULD anybody be surprised that sales of Greg Dyke's *Inside Story* are so disappointing?

First week sales of 2,000, reported by HarperCollins, would be respectable if the book hadn't cost the firm £500,000 and been supported by serialisations and heavy TV coverage.

The fact is that political and media memoirs earn publishers brownie points within their own cosy, self-referential little world, but rarely sell many copies in the real world. People in the media are usually wrong when they think the general public is as interested in their line of business as they are.

Added to this, ever-more-detailed serialisations and interviews reduce the potential audience further by telling most casual readers everything they want to know. All that can be said in Harpic's defence is that if it hadn't paid £500,000 for Dyke's book, some other mug would have.

■ SCARCELY any large publisher in Britain is now UK-owned, following W.H. Smith's sale of Hodder Headline to French "media and technology" group Lagardère for £223m – a deal warmly welcomed by the Honourable (and very rich) Tim Hely Hutchinson and his fellow directors.

What Hodder bosses seem less keen to discuss is exactly what kind of "technology" Lagardère makes its money from. According to its most recent half-yearly results, about 35 percent of the group's earnings come from its stake in EADS (European Aeronautic Defence and Space). EADS's main project is of course Airbus; but a significant and increasing share of its business is focussed on missiles, warheads, attack helicopters and Eurofighters.

Lagardère got involved in the EADS consortium through its ownership of Matra (now Aerospatiale Matra following a 1999 merger), best known as the maker of the Exocet missiles which were fired by Argentina at British ships in the Falklands war. Matra has many such interesting customers: last October the Pentagon discovered that half the rockets fired by pro-Saddam guerrillas at Baghdad's Al-Rashid hotel – where deputy defence secretary Paul Wolfowitz was staying – were French-made Matra SNEBs. Fittingly enough, Saddam Hussein himself owned a 2.5 percent stake in Matra through a front company registered in Panama. The holding has now been frozen but will be transferred to the new Iraqi government after next year's elections.

No wonder Hodder is so keen to keep quiet about Lagardère's other interests. They might distress Hodder authors such as John Le Carré, Ronan Bennett and Anthony Sampson. One of Sampson's many books published by Hodder is, er, The Arms Bazaar – a detailed exposé of the international defence industry.

■ REVIEWING former *Torygraph* literary editor John Coldstream's biography of Dirk Bogarde in the *Guardian*, Michael Coveney noted that "Coldstream and other Bogarde supporters have taken umbrage" at the *Daily Mail* serialisation of the book "claiming that a serious hagiography was sensationally distorted".

Coveney retorts that "It was not... Coldstream... does a warts and all job on the actor and should have known, when selling to the *Mail*, that the warts would be of most interest to them."

The *Guardian*, evidently, is above such muck-raking? Well, no actually. Readers who turned to page 7 of that day's news section were treated to a story about the newly-published memoirs of queeny old thespian John Fraser, headlined "Sexy self-image that revved up Dirk Bogarde".

In his book Fraser suggests that Bogarde's main sexual thrill was gained from sitting astride a stationary Harley-Davidson and revving it up for 10 minutes "his expression like the rapture on the face of a medieval saint", all the while "gazing at a poster of himself clad in crotch-hugging leather trousers as a Spanish bandit in the 1961 film *The Singer Not The Song*".

This instructive half-page is capped off with a rather fetching picture of Bogarde in the aforementioned leather trousers. The "Bogarde supporters" are unlikely to be pleased with Fraser's observations.

FIRST DRAFTS

Will Self

■ THE merits of Professor Terry Eagleton's new work, *The English Novel: An Introduction*, have already been called into question by one or two of its reviewers: "slapdash and sectarian", according to the *Guardian*.

Thus far, though, critics have charitably avoided drawing attention to the book's most obvious howler. This is the reference, in the chapter on Charles Dickens (p151) to "Agnes Wakefield" and "Miss Haversham" – two characters, alas, unknown to Dickens scholars.

■ STAFF at Simon & Schuster are still recovering from the company's first "Diversity Training Day", held on the orders of US mother company, Viacom.

Everyone at the London HQ was asked to fill out a "Discovering Diversity Profile" which asked if they agreed that, among other things, "the US workforce is generally becoming more diverse", "most Hispanics are emotional," and "people of color earn their positions".

Sadly several staff had pressing engagements which forced them to leave the training sessions before the end, thus depriving them of the concluding advice: to "seek an opportunity to interact with a group where you are the only representative from your culture. Set an initial goal to become a member of the group, then set a follow-up goal to become an active participant while simultaneously maintaining your own identity" – something it is becoming increasingly hard for the company's UK operations to do.

'Bookworm'

LUVVIES

"I work away from home so much, I work in exile so much. British actors are a diaspora unto themselves."

— Sir Ben Kingsley, *Sunday Times*

"Building a character is like constructing a cathedral. Actors are plonked on to the fringes of society, but we're crucial to the survival of the tribe because storytelling is one of the oldest activities. I think of acting as healing the audience, and for me, functioning the best I can allows me not to get sick, as it were."

— Sir Ben Kingsley, **Radio Times.**

'...the most beautiful song ever written about being urinated on during sex.'

ALEXIS PETRIDIS on 'Golden Streams' by The Hidden Cameras, *Guardian*

When confronted with doing a record cover 25 years ago, I wasn't doing a cover for a record to evoke the values of a particular song or music. I was saying: where does this music fit into contemporary life? To what niche in contemporary living is this band the soundtrack?

PETER SAVILE
The Times

Critics dedicated to astute Firbankian records of concinnicity, such as Brigid Brophy, could point to her past as a stylist in the tradition of Benjamin Constant; but they could hardly point to a concomitant depth.

Obituary of Francoise Sagan
The Times

Her jewellery has the feelgood factor in more ways than one: the semiprecious gems she uses have been cleared of negative energy and programmed with positive vibes by her meditation teacher. Sienna Miller, a friend and fan, declared that the peacefulness and clarity emanating from the pieces she wore during the filming of Alfie helped her at the beginning of her relationship with Jude Law.

COLLETTE LYONS on designer Philippa Holland, *Sunday Times Style Section*

There are bands who use noise as a means of disguising a lack of talent or, indeed, ambition. Then there are those who play the noise card as an ambient vacuum, using discordant embolisms as an expressive dysfunctional alternative to convention.

Review of an album by heavy metal band Earth, *Metal Hammer*

To be alive to fashion and what it can offer us is to understand the importance of the present tense. The possibility that there are always new clothes is part of what keeps us alive.

LINDA GRANT
Guardian

Pseuds Corporate

CALLER: I'd like to speak to the Health and Safety manager, please.

POST OFFICE EMPLOYEE: I'm afraid that's not possible. He's not customer-facing.

Extract from telephone conversation with Post Office Customer Care department, 22 September 2004

CONTRIBUTORS: Nigel Morgan, APR, Stanley Hooper, Helen Senior, Steve Dulson, Chris Marsh, Meg Howarth.

£10 paid for all entries

IN THE BACK

NHS PRIVATISATION

Kaiser bill

LAST WEEK's NHS Modernisation Agency conference on the much-hyped treatment centre programme – the mix of private and NHS one-stop units springing up around the country to offer quick and relatively easy diagnosis and surgery – struck a self-congratulatory note.

But a study published this summer suggests there is *no* evidence that bringing private companies into the NHS is increasing efficiency or reducing costs. Quite the opposite, in fact.

This news will not please the government, which has always promoted health secretary John Reid's favourite private US healthcare providers, Kaiser Permanente, citing a seven-page research paper in the *British Medical Journal* in 2002 which purported to show that Kaiser offered "better performance at roughly the same costs as the NHS".

This conclusion, extolling the benefits of competition, was manna from heaven for health ministers who had been criticised for closing 10,000 NHS beds since Labour came to power. But it seems it was all nonsense.

For a start, two of the report's three authors used to work for Kaiser; and their paper triggered a storm of protest in the US and from the medical and scientific community here, highlighting its flawed analysis and conclusions. It emerged that Kaiser's costs were deflated while NHS costs were inflated; Kaiser patients were the "working well" but NHS patients included the poor, elderly and chronically ill; and individual Kaiser charges for visits and treatment were ignored.

Nevertheless, the protests were ignored and the paper – described by one leading academic as "not worthy of a first year student" – went on to form British government policy, featuring in the 2002 review of NHS funding by Derek Wanless and the subsequent white paper on how to deliver the NHS plan. The department of health even joined forces with Kaiser in "learning from Kaiser Permanente" projects managing chronic conditions and care.

In the summer, however, the scientific record was finally put straight with a paper in the *British Journal of General Practice* which comprehensively exposed that the Kaiser paper was propaganda masked as science. It detailed the way in which authors used counting tricks including a curious foreign exchange currency conversion which had the effect of almost doubling NHS costs. Despite this evidence the Kaiser paper has still not been officially withdrawn. Instead it is still promoted on health department websites.

Allyson Pollock (pictured below), professor of health policy at University College London and one of the authors of critical *BJGP* paper, said: "There is no evidence that introducing private companies increases efficiency or quality or reduces costs. Indeed all the evidence goes the other way. Markets – even those underwritten by the state – do not deliver comprehensive universal healthcare. Research in the US has shown how private health providers select the profitable patients, treatments and conditions and at a greater cost than public providers."

PRISONS

Game of tag

LAST YEAR the home office and probation chiefs were promoting curfews and tags as a cheaper alternative to probation and drug treatment orders – until, that is, the three private companies running the electronic tagging schemes starting putting in their bills.

Eye readers may recall that they were charging about 10 times the actual cost -- a bill for taxpayers of more than £100m a year.

Napo, the probation union, long ago highlighted the fact that the annual cost of tagging -- about £8,000 per offender per year – was £2,000 a year more than drug treatment programmes and three times as much as a straight probation order. And it also expressed concern that while tagging was getting the hard commercial sell, no one had evaluated how effective it was in encouraging rehabilitation, compared to probation supervision or treatment.

But probation chiefs have at last got the message that tagging as a community penalty merely puts profits into the pockets of the private sector. Steve Murphy, the new head of the national probation directorate, has sent out a message to all chief officers urging that tagging curfews should only be recommended as a last resort and for high-risk offenders.

This may not please home secretary David Blunkett's friends in the private security industry. Tagging is clearly only a proven cheaper alternative to prison; and judges and magistrates have yet to be won over to use it in sufficent numbers to satisfy the market.

NOMS bombs

MORE on the national offender management service (NOMS), whose underworked £70,000-a-year regional managers with nebulous job descriptions (see *Eye* 1115) have just come up with the first "cluster" of jails to be run by the private sector.

With supremo Martin Narey's approval, they have decided that four prisons dedicated to holding the most volatile and vulnerable inmates, 15-to-18-year-olds, should be put out to tender in one package – no doubt to make the economies of scale more attractive to the security industry.

The move is controversial because, though the national audit office (NAO) has found that private companies have brought some improvement and efficiencies in some adult jails, the same cannot be said for their involvement with troubled young people. The only other jail dedicated to the 15-to-18 age group, Ashfield, near Bristol, is already being run by Premier Prisons and has one of the worst reputations in the country: for bullying, violence and in the way it was managed. In fact the situation grew so bad the home office had to replace the private sector governor with one from the public sector.

The private sector is also responsible for the country's troubled secure training units, the three child jails for 12-to-15-year-olds. Recently the *Eye* reported how 15-year-old Gareth Myatt died following the use of restraint by officers in Rainsbrook, a unit in the Midlands run by Group 4 subsidiary Rebound ECD.

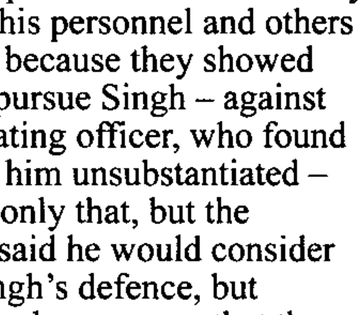
So the only motive for the proposed "market testing" at Huntercombe in Oxfordshire, Wetherby in West Yorkshire, Werrington in Stoke-on-Trent and Warren Hill in Suffolk can be to save money. Young offenders, at around £100 a day, are among the most expensive to detain.

It is no secret that the private sector manages to run its jails for less because it pays its staff a fraction of that paid to public sector prison officers. But a recent study by Catalyst, the think tank chaired by Roy Hattersley, showed that the turnover of staff was also ten times higher in the private sector, leading to disruption and shortages of experienced staff. Just what you need when dealing with troubled young people.

PS: NOMS boss Martin Narey has been deterred from applying for other jobs in the Civil Service and told that he has to sort out the mess at NOMS first. (Or take the rap when its continuing failures start attracting too much bad publicity for home secretary David Blunkett.)

POLICE 5

Singh a sad song



DOES the Metropolitan police have nothing better to do than waste time and money wrongfully victimising its own ethnic minority officers?

Last month PC Palbinder Singh received a cheque and apology from Scotland Yard to settle his employment tribunal claim for racial discrimination and victimisation. It was just the latest in a line of extraordinary cases (cf Sgt Gurpal Virdi and Superintendent Ali Desai, *Eyes passim*).

PC Singh was originally accused by fellow officers of assault; and in his protracted case the police even tried to claim public interest immunity to avoid having to reveal his personnel and others records. Perhaps this was because they showed that the determination to pursue Singh – against the advice of the investigating officer, who found the assault claims against him unsubstantiated – went to the very top. Not only that, but the investigating officer also said he would consider giving evidence in PC Singh's defence, but minutes of a meeting were drawn up so that the investigating officer's concerns were not recorded.

PC Singh, a 28-year-old politics graduate, was a probationer when he was accused of assaulting and abusing a drunk, who had accosted him in London's West End. The allegations came not from the drunk (he told investigators he did not wish to make a complaint and apologised for his actions) but from two fellow officers. Singh denied their allegations and said he himself had been racially abused by the drunk and wrestled to the floor. He did admit that during the scuffle he had sworn at the man.

A lengthy investigation led by a detective chief constable found the allegations of assault unsubstantiated and recommended neither criminal nor formal disciplinary action. He suggested Singh's swearing be dealt with by way of informal words of advice and training. That would have been the end of the matter but for Singh's superior officers – up to deputy assistant commissioner level – who wanted stronger action.

Hence a file was sent to the CPS. When no criminal charge was brought, senior officers determined that at the very least Singh should receive a formal written warning or face a disciplinary hearing. Mr Singh had initially been suspended and there were moves to delay his becoming confirmed as a constable. He was also given another written warning for failing to record in his notebook the use of handcuffs on a shoplifter – not by himself, but by another officer.

It was not until his case was reviewed by Commander Cressida Dick, head of the diversity unit set up in the wake of the Macpherson inquiry, that formal disciplinary action was dropped on the grounds that it was "wholly disproportionate". Last month, four years after the original incident, and although the police denied liability, Deputy Commissioner Sir Ian Blair wrote to the PC to "express regret" for the events that caused him to bring his action for race discrimination and the stress they caused.

He said: "I can assure you that your career and promotion prospects will not be affected as a result of your bringing these proceedings."

No senior officer has yet been challenged over the way they dealt with the young officer.

PUBLIC PAYPHONES

Call box cull

DID ANYONE notice that BT held a consultation this summer into its plans to cull more than 10,000 unprofitable public payphones? The plan will leave many remote rural areas which have no mobile phone reception without a public payphone for miles. Yet from the way BT is pressing ahead, it seems the consultation showed everyone was delighted.

Local authorities were given 40 days to respond to the proposals. They were sent a list of threatened phones and asked to talk to local communities and make an individual case for each one they wanted to retain. Given that it was peak staff holiday season and many local councils don't meet during August, this was an impossible task. In one Norfolk district where 125 phones were listed, council officers only had time to write a defence of 20.

The village of Berriedale in south-east Caithness, has no mobile phone reception and is near an accident-prone stretch of the A9. But it looks set to lose its phone box anyway. Local MSP Rob Gibson describes it as "tantamount to removing safety rings" from the banks of a river. Meanwhile in Scarborough a campaign is underway to save the 36 payphones BT wants to remove from the surrounding countryside.

The charity Childline receives a huge share of calls to its freephone number from payphones and many calls to emergency and rescue services are made from phone boxes. Many low paid keyworkers, such as home-helps, rely on payphones to keep in touch with their employer. For homeless people and those in temporary accommodation, payphones are often vital.

Use of payphones has massively decreased as mobile phones have become commonplace and pro-payphone campaigners agree that the burden of providing them as a public service falls unfairly on BT (and Kingston Upon Hull Communications) rather than being shared around the many phone companies. They are asking watchdog Ofcom to consider a wider levy to fund payphones.

LEGAL REFORM

No win, no fee, no shame

CIVIL JUSTICE minister David Lammy has been making all the right noises about reforming the iniquitous "no win, no fee" deals (aka "conditional fee arrangements" or CFAs) which line the pockets of lawyers while turning personal injury and libel cases (for which legal aid isn't available) into high-risk lotteries for their clients.

Last month the department for constitutional affairs (DCA) issued a consultation paper, *Making Simple CFAs a Reality*, to reform personal injury claims; and in the same week major news organisations asked the department to end the CFA scam in libel cases. Why? Because greedy law firms, such as Peter Carter-Fuck and partners, have turned "no win, no fee" into a "lawyers-can't-lose" system. By charging clients in weak or tricky cases, the lawyers are quids in, win or lose; by taking on strong cases as CFAs, the lawyers double their money when they win by hammering the losing side for inflated costs (while insuring against any cases which are lost). So how has Lammy's consultation been received in the profession?

Eye 1107 reported on the case of Hossacks, a small firm of Northamptonshire solicitors specialising in legal challenges to the closure of old folks' homes, that was in dispute with the Legal Services Commission (LSC), which administers legal aid, over its refusal to fund any of Hossacks' cases outside the east Midlands. The firm's principal, Yvonne Hossack, began proceedings for libel against the LSC after discovering that a series of allegedly defamatory emails had been posted about her by LSC staff.

Mrs Hossack approached Carter-Fuck and Partners to ask if it would handle her action against the LSC on a no win, no fee basis. At first PC-F was helpful, but it then changed its mind, telling Hossack that, in view of the consultation on CFAs by David Lammy – who also happens to be the minister in charge of the LSC – it had decided not to take the case as it would be "disastrous" for business.

Mrs Hossack is now fighting the action on her own. Last week she was informed that the LSC had instructed fancypants "boutique" media lawyer David Price to defend the case. On a "no win, no fee" basis.

PFI

Watchdog whimpers

THE national audit office (NAO), the official watchdog whose job is to assess objectively government private finance initiative projects, appears to be getting closer to the PFI and those who prosper from it.

In July a study by Professor Alyson Pollock at University College London showed that, while the NAO continues to pick up numerous examples of PFI cost overruns, it has not so far assessed the value for money of PFI against the public sector alternative.

Back in May *Eye* 1107 reported a prime example of this apparent indifference in the NAO's report on the Mapeley affair, where the alleged value of the PFI contract compared to the alternative of keeping the buildings in the public sector was accepted unquestioningly – despite annual payments already exceeding what the deal promised. Last month the normally pro-PFI Institute of Public Policy Research showed that there was a marked tendency for public bodies to choose PFI so they could get assets and debts off their balance sheets even if doing so wasn't cost-effective – a point the NAO had conspicuously failed to pick up in any of its reports on PFI deals.

Now a clue emerges as to what is shaping the NAO's softer approach to PFIs. This summer's NAO conference was less than objectively headlined "The new agenda: how PFI/PPP is adapting to deliver future success". Rubbing shoulders in the Queen Elizabeth II conference centre were all the big names from the PFI world, with speakers including: head of the NAO, Sir John Bourn; his PFI director James Robertson; head of "PFI development" at the NAO, David Finlay; head of the treasury's PFI unit, Geoffrey Spence; Partnerships UK chief executive James Stewart; KPMG partner Chris Nicholson; PwC partner Martin Callaghan; and Chris Hyman, chief executive of PFI company Serco.

On 16 November the PFI circus will move to the Royal Garden Hotel in Kensington for the "procuring flexibility and sustainability in PPPs" conference, where private sector delegates will be able to "network with senior colleagues and government officials awarding PPP contracts". Mr Finlay from the NAO will be there again, with a similar selection of the PFI great and good.

Serco silence

WHEN THE NAO hosts a "performance measurement" conference at the Carlton Tower in November, guest speaker will be NAO favourite Chris Hyman, of Serco.

The firm has just announced a record PFI order book showing £10bn of projects in the pipeline. But Mr Hyman is not expected to relate his firm's less than impressive performance when it took over Bradford's education services from the local authority.

serco

In 2002 it hit just five out of 52 performance targets and, to much disgust in Yorkshire, responded by persuading the local council to reduce its performance targets and guarantee incentive payments. Nor, just as leaked home office documents reveal that the government's four remaining juvenile prisons may be privatised, will Hyman want too much discussion of how Serco's Premier Prisons was judged to have performed so badly at Ashfield juvenile jail two years ago that a state-appointed governor was drafted in to replace the Serco man.

Sick joke

THE government is clearly so impressed with the London Underground public-private partnership (PPP) that it wants all future private finance initiative (PFI) schemes to run as smoothly.

In reality the Tube is probably the government's worst privatisation to date, with massive payments to consultants and baroque contracts failing to deliver improvements or better costs. Nevertheless Labour has appointed one of the key Tube privatisers to the board of , the official quango that promotes PFI deals.

Partnerships UK, known as P:UK and pronounced Puke, is supposed to push the PFI by advising or investing in the best projects. Last month it took on to its board one David Clements, a board member of WS Atkins and a key player in the Metronet consortium which holds one third of the Tube. He joins with Nicolas Lethbridge, outgoing director of Babcock & Brown, an American bank specialising in British PFI schemes.

partnerships uk

SUGAR AND DIET

Sweet 'n' sour

"SUGAR is next," the department of health's head of health improvement, Imogen Sharp, told a conference of GPs recently, following up the current drive to reduce salt in the British diet using the persuasive powers of giant slugs. Meanwhile in Scotland MSPs have been talking about removing all fizzy drink vending machines from Scottish schools – a popular idea with many health campaigners.

The *Panorama* revelations that two major sugar lobbying organisations secretly funded a 1998 United Nations study into how much sugar we should eat, are a good indicator that the industry won't take these assaults lying down.

Moves similar to those planned by the DoH and the MSPs didn't go down well in the US, for example. Attempts to ban "sodas" from schools and to restrict snack sales in California resulted in massive lobbying from the Califonia-Nevada Soft Drink Association (aka the combined clout of Coca Cola and PepsiCo) and the Grocery Manufacturers of America (Kraft Foods, Nestlé and friends). Both measures were scuppered.

Meanwhile, the food industry has been bumping up its PR with yet more junk science on junk food. Over at PepsiCo's "healthispower.net" website can be found lots of nutritional advice for parents and schools including this gem: "To perform at their best, kids have to refuel. They need convenient snacks and beverages that refresh and provide quick energy. Snacks can be another opportunity for kids to add servings of nutritious food to their daily diets."

Couldn't happen here? The British Sugar Bureau's PR machine has already been spewing out similar nonsense, such as: "Most people can't manage a heavy starchy meal immediately after exercise, but having a soft drink or eating a sugary snack, can start to refill carbohydrate stores straight away," while British Sugar harps on that 1998 report: "Recent expert reports have concluded that there is no need to advise consumers to restrict their sugar consumption."

The DoH will have its work cut out.

You can contact the In the Back team on 020 7437 4017

In the City

THE announcement last month that two top Customs officials have been suspended and another 18 serving and retired officials are under investigation over the handling of previous fraud investigations will not have been welcome news among the great and good where those who once ran HM Customs & Excise now reside.

Certain of the questions likely to be raised by the Scotland Yard investigation and those it targets could examine Customs' prosecution policies and practices during the period when Barclays' senior non-executive director Sir Richard Broadbent was chairman. The former Schroders merchant banker was in charge from 2000 to 2003.

Other questions could well encompass the period from 1993 when Broadbent's predecessor, Dame Valerie Strachan, was at the top. She is now deputy head of both the Community Fund and the Big Lottery Fund. What they knew and what they sought to find out could well become an issue.

Strachan and Broadbent, while certain to deny any personal wrongdoing or awareness of the wrongdoing of others, could face embarrassment over their knowledge (or lack of it) of Customs' investigations and prosecutions and – in Broadbent's case – of the responses to the investigations carried out into Customs by both the Yard and Lord Justice Butterfield.

Broadbent was due to step down just weeks after Butterfield's report was published in July 2003. He welcomed the report and accepted the judge's criticisms of Customs' prosecutions and procedures. He joined Barclays that September and next month becomes chairman of train and bus group Arriva.

Both he and Strachan could face allegations from those officials who are charged or subjected to disciplinary proceedings that much of what was done was the result of a Customs' policy encouraged from the top to boost prosecutions, play the numbers game and show that it could survive as a separate crime-fighting force. If so, then undoubtedly and with justification Broadbent and Strachan will deny that their well intentioned policies contributed unwittingly in any way to the bad behaviour of rogue Customs officers and compliant lawyers.

The treasury, said to have been dragging its feet in the face of mounting evidence from the police investigation, admitted two weeks ago that 20 retired or serving officials are under investigation over allegations of withholding evidence and perjury – in particular relating to excise fraud cases surrounding the London City Bond bonded warehouses run by a participating Customs informant, Alfred Allington.

The Yard investigation has been running now for almost two years since the collapse of the trial of 15 men in Liverpool in November 2002, accused of evading £84m in excise duty, largely because of the failure of Customs to disclose that Allington was an informant.

Allington testified in some 80 trials, the results of which could now be overturned. The excise frauds involved could have cost the treasury more than £2bn in lost duty. He and other informants were presented as victims or trade sources.

Allington has never been charged with any offence by Customs. But investigators believe that Customs officials knew Allington was assisting major frauds and often giving up the smaller fry while protecting others, particularly serious London "faces", who he feared. The suspicion is that Allington also acted as an *agent provocateur* encouraging some of the frauds, boosting his status and the Customs' numbers.

"Oh, no! They're reproducing!"

Not only did Customs officials withhold the fact that Allington was a registered informant from the trials of those against whom he testified; they also withheld evidence about him from Butterfield until after the judge had written his report. Other incriminating information was also withheld from the Yard investigation.

The Butterfield inquiry confirmed "disastrous" failings in the handling of informants, non-disclosure of information and poor communications between Customs teams but no evidence of entrapment. However, Butterfield was seen by some as too soft on Customs. He reportedly said of the police investigation that he disliked the idea of "sheriffs chasing sheriffs".

The Butterfield report identified 13 prosecutions involving the evasion of £668m in excuse duty. Allington testified in trials that produced more than 200 convictions. These convictions could now be overturned on appeal. More than 100 defendants from cases brought in 2001 and 2002 have already had their convictions quashed or the cases dropped.

Allington was registered as a Customs informant from 1994. From 1998 he testified in trials at which his role as a participating informant was repeatedly denied. Customs officials and lawyers acting for them persistently lied to or misled judges about Allington's true status.

A three-page internal Customs document detailing his informant record was not disclosed until last year. That document was initially kept from Butterfield and may well have influenced his view that Customs when using Allington had not incited excise frauds or entrapped those convicted on Allington's evidence.

Those with knowledge of the investigation believe that much of what happened regarding the repeated use of Allington to generate successful prosecutions was driven by a policy of seeking to show that Customs was on top of the excise loss problem. More prosecutions produced more statistics to prove that Customs was successfully prosecuting major booze and tobacco evaders at a time when parliament and the government were on its case about the multi-billion loss of revenue.

That pressure for prosecutions with big numbers attached is blamed by some for the climate that encouraged the use and abuse of Allington and his LCB operation. It was not state-sponsored crime but it was getting there.

Evidence uncovered by the police investigation is said to indicate that huge excise frauds were run through LCB by Allington's criminal associates – either undetected by Customs or, when suspected, allowed to run in order to preserve their key source of prosecutions. This loss to the treasury was covered-up and justified on the basis of protecting Allington as the Customs' ace informant.

Once questions were raised about Allington – partly the result of the prosecution of one of his "heavy" associates (who pressured the informer into admitting his role) by Customs officers not in the loop – then a cover-up began within Customs. The aim was to allow some "over enthusiastic" junior investigators to take the fall but prevent action further up the investigation food chain.

Just how far up the Customs chain of command the problem went was illustrated by the suspension of Terry Byrne, the director-general law enforcement, and the Customs' senior in-house lawyer David Pickup (sick). The treasury stressed that this did not mean either man would be charged and that the investigation was still at "an early stage".

Investigators suspect there may have been other financial target-driven prosecutions that extended to Customs informers active in drugs and the carousel VAT frauds involving mobile phones and computer chips. Butterfield is already investigating previous money-laundering prosecutions concerning bureaux de change following the collapse of a retrial a year ago of three men convicted of laundering £3m over the actions of Customs informants.

Police believe that eventually a number of Customs figures will stand trial, ranging from investigators to senior officials. The charges are expected to include misfeasance in office as well as perjury and conspiracy to pervert the course of justice. The investigation is examining not just the conduct of the trials involving Allington and others, but also the withholding of evidence and

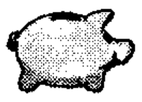
THE DIRECTORS — DREDGE & RIGG

SO HOW WAS TEXAS, SIR JULIAN?
FANTASTIC! IT'S THE AMERICAN DREAM…
YOU CAN SACK PEOPLE OR CUT THEIR WAGES ANYTIME YOU LIKE…
…AND THEY ONLY GET ONE WEEK'S HOLIDAY– I HAD TO PINCH, MYSELF!
12.

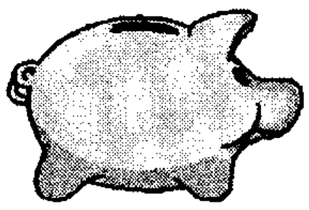
LOOT! by 'Bruin'

...in Iraq

Annual pay for...



£22,000
US soldiers*



£2,550,000
Halliburton chairman
David Lesar

*Enlisted serviceman average: includes £2,200 'danger money' for serving in Iraq

documents from the Butterfield inquiry and from the Yard investigation, Operation Gestalt.

SO THE Russians are not after all coming to the financial rescue of Everton.

The premiership club is still expected to be taken over by the Fortress Sports Fund from Brunei, set up by Geneva-based company administrator Christopher Samuelson. But now the initial £13m to be injected for a near 30 percent stake – with the option to put up a further £17m to increase that to 50 percent – is set to come from Samuelson and a collection of Fortress investors – wealthy clients/associates about whom little is so far known except that they have the most colourful names you could not make up: Guy de la Tour du Pin, Patricia German-Ribon, Robert Steelhammer and the unforgettable Emily Willi.

Just what these investors and others as yet unidentified by Samuelson know or care about the Toffeemen and why they should want to invest £30m remains to be seen. At a time when the humble depositor at any high street building society is required to produce overwhelming evidence of identity and the source of their money, it is to be hoped the Football Association will press for full public disclosure about those who may end up in control of a premiership soccer club with multi-million revenues.

Meanwhile evidence has emerged of at least some tangential connection between Samuelson, who like all those who seek soccer clubs claims long standing allegiance to Everton, and the Merseyside club. Sadly it may not be a good omen.

For three years from 1996 Samuelson was a non-executive director of Alliance Resources which had pretensions to becoming a player in the oil business. He was appointed after the company sacked its chief executive, John O'Brien, in 1995 over funny business at its US oil wells which resulted in an inconclusive Serious Farce Office investigation and a civil settlement.

Samuelson was brought in because of his links with oil in the former Soviet Union. He had a number of offshore directorships in that area, plus his close links to Yukos's Mikhail Khodorkovsky, a one-time shareholder in his Valmet group.

No Russian oil deals materialised but Alliance did acquire more US oil interests and in 1998 decided to buy a 20 percent stake in a dozen gas exploration blocks in the east Irish Sea and Liverpool Bay. Sadly it was unable to raise the $100m required to buy and develop. But the deal was restructured and Alliance paid $22m for a 10 percent stake in three gas wells off Morecambe.

Unfortunately Alliance continued to make losses and incur increasing bank debt. Losses went from $1.8m in 1997 to $11m and debt to $50m in 1999 by which time Samuelson had resigned. The shares, 60p in 1997, were pennies by the time a share swap with a small American oil concern AROC came along in late 1999. Those shares went for cents in 2002.

Hopefully the experience of Everton fans and shareholders will be better than those in Alliance Resources.

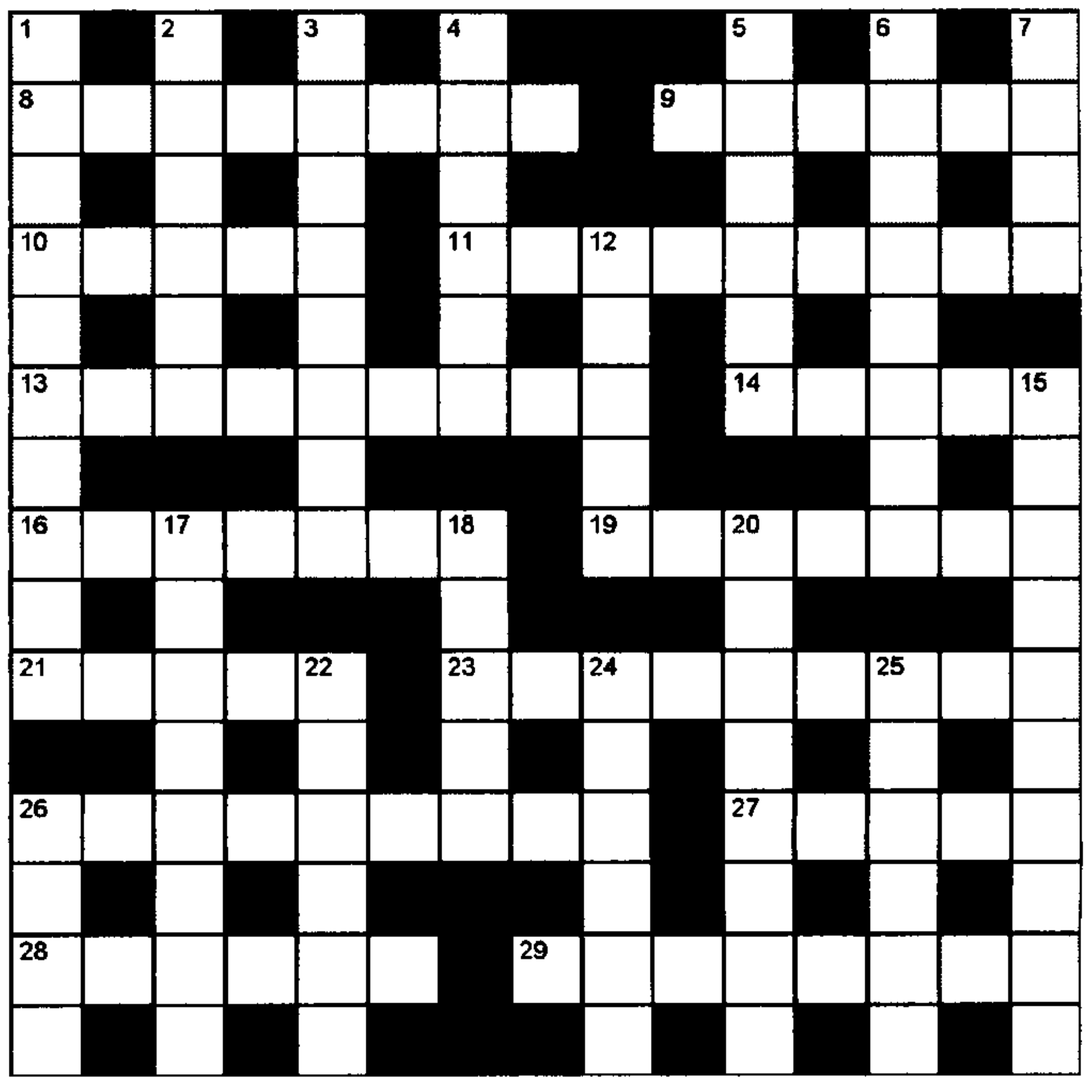
'Slicker'

EYE CROSSWORD 272

by Cyclops

£100 prize to first correct solution opened on 22 October 2004.

Entries to 'Crossword', Private Eye, 6 Carlisle Street, London W1D 3BN or via email to crossword@private-eye.co.uk



ACROSS

8 America retreats and Brenda left in the shit – "Where may one go in style?" (5,3)

9 Eye-related volume on Saudi fiasco, 'Left for Dead' (6)

10 Kofi's lot ignored but left in the picture? (5)

11 Medal one gets positioned centrally on chest for failing in business (5,4)

13 It has no meaning, Birt's day – universal spinning (9)

14 Gem of an estate agent's "no room to swing a cat" (5)

16 Be exclusive and act like Brenda – unfashionable (4,3)

19 Archer's thing: to yearn to be subservient (7)

21 Sexy female to have child by Howard, say? No alternative (5)

23 There's perverse irony about New (reduced) Labour following their leader —— (4,5)

26 Not a bitch to tuck in tail, being fiercely competitive (3-3-3)

27 The old country *Pisspoor Daily* (5)

28 Arse half let out – courage! (6)

29 National symbol, Prescott? Bollocks! (4,4)

DOWN

1 Do a Goldsmith, son, subjugating a hack without hesitation (5,1,4)

2 Curry's just one of these agents to 'have' the leader of Conservatives (6)

3 Composition of Tory centre: one 75% Tory +10 (8)

4 A character with beastly mates, Cyclops is getting an erection, funny glow inside (6)

5 Generous lavatory overturned by loud mouth (3,3)

6 A racket inserted into biblical character's rectum? (3-2-3)

7 Bloody thick thing in Conservative crowd (4)

12 Heaven on earth, though a tad untidy, Llandudno? (5)

15 Not having it in one to stomach Labour (quite beyond one) (10)

17 Live sex gets one access to dispute in law (8)

18 Time to ring Heath – bore! (5)

20 Getting at giving head to bishop, Heather? (8)

22 Not often enough to see the back of Tory, Prior? (6)

24 Pisspoor sentimental tripe accepted by acquiescent gesture (2,4)

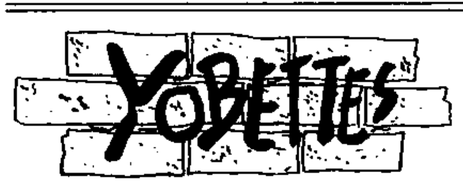
25 It's vulgarly said more firm erection could result from this (6)

26 'Enhances' recording (Bush's "Ya!" removed) (4)

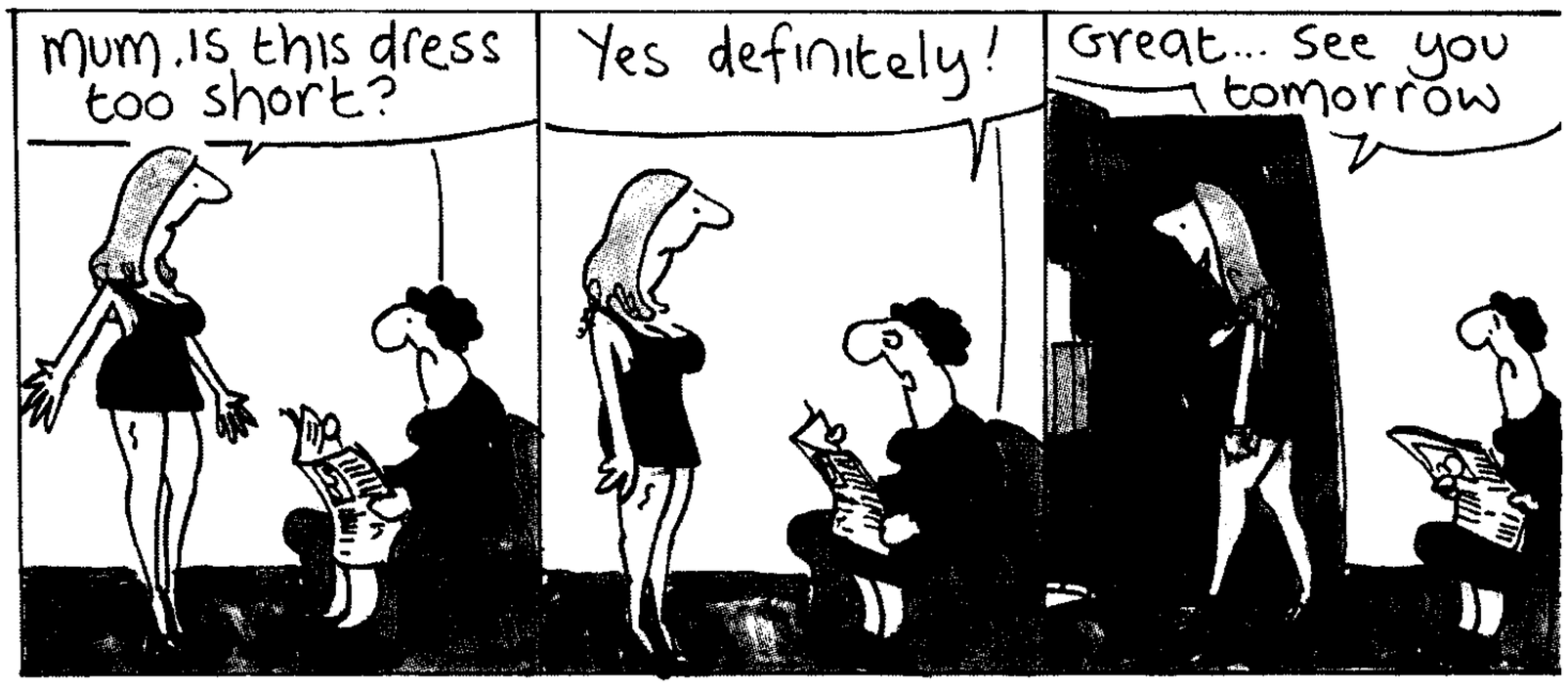
Crossword 271 winner: STEVEN GEBURTIG

ACROSS: 1 Kilroy-Silk 6 Wank 10 Rushdie 11 Moisten 12 Sectioned 14 Chukka 15 Schmaltz 18 Clear off 20 Groped 23 Rehab 25 Ectoplasm 27 Bacardi 28 Modicum 29 Nosh 30 Egocentric.

DOWN: 1 Kurds 2 Lost cause 3 Old Nick 4/13 Seeing stars 5 Limp dick 7 Astra 8 King-sized 9 Dim sum 14 Cock robin 16 Lap dancer 17 Offering 19 Reborn 21 Roped in 22 Atomic 24 Hacks 26 Mimic.



HUSBAND



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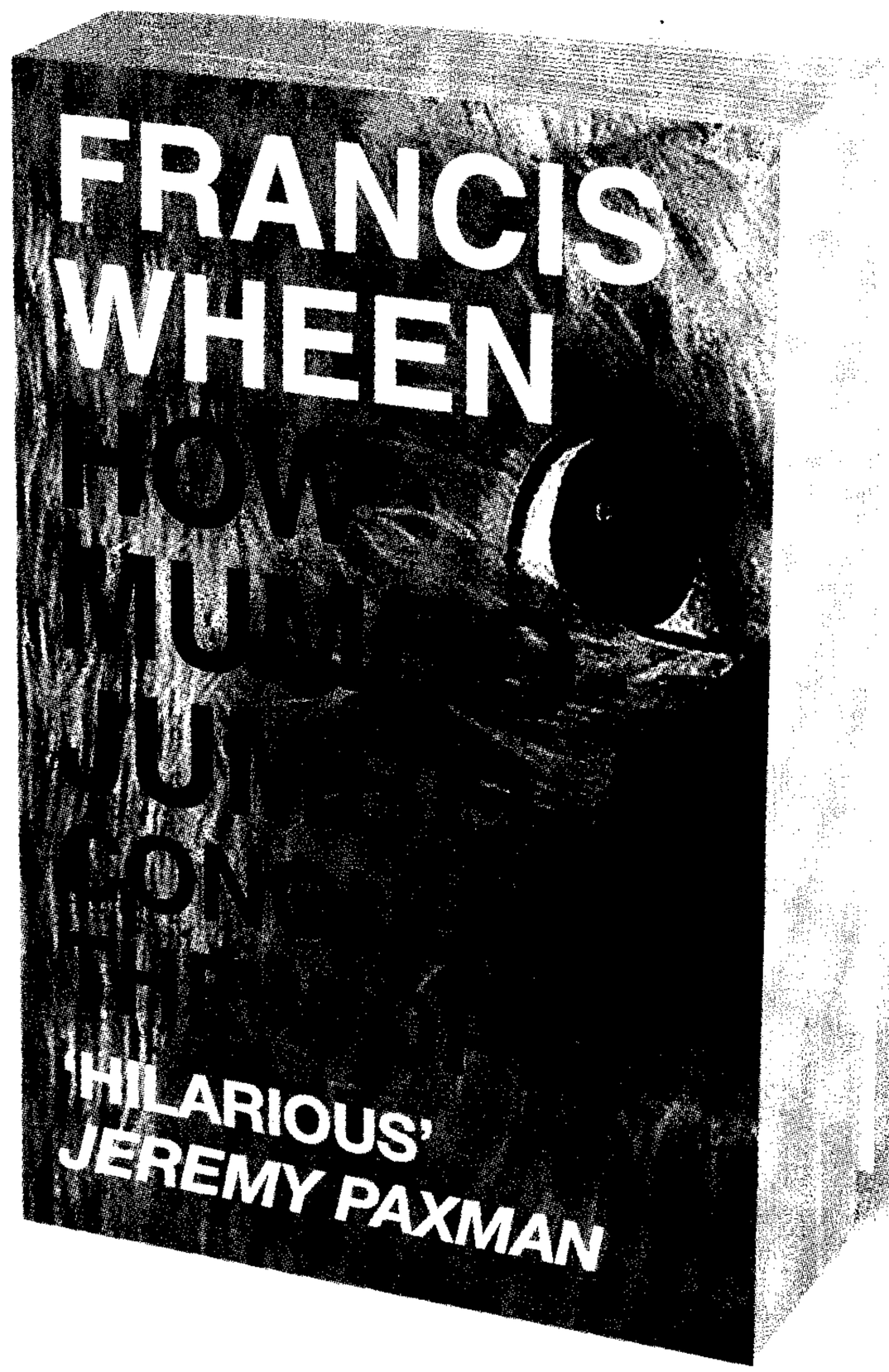

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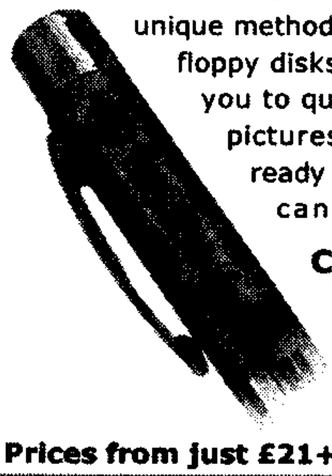

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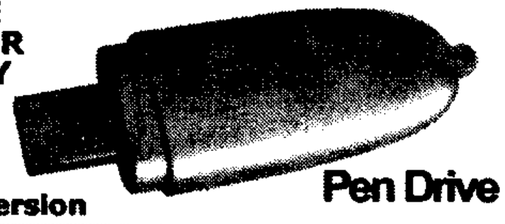

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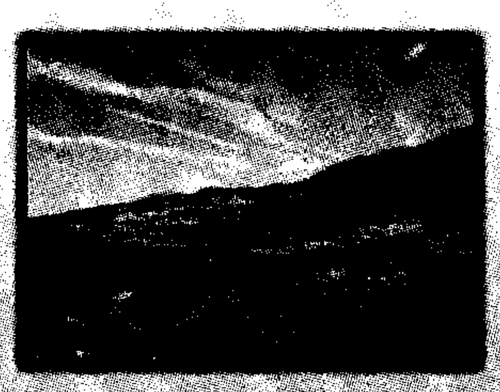

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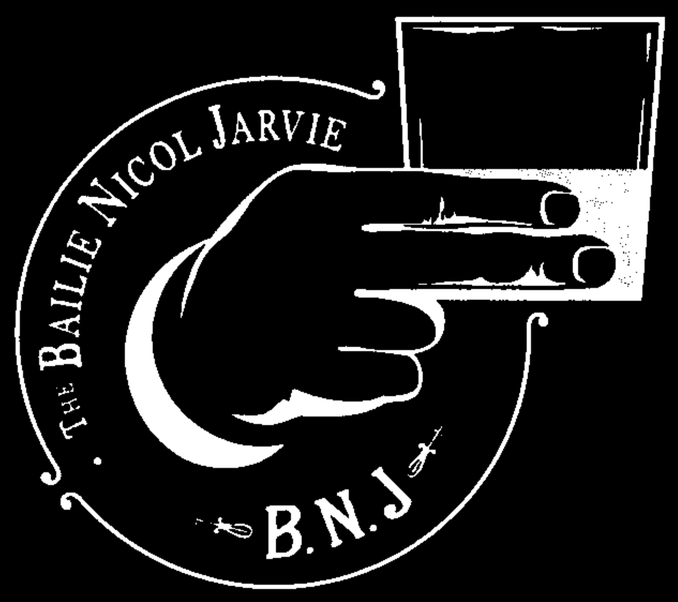

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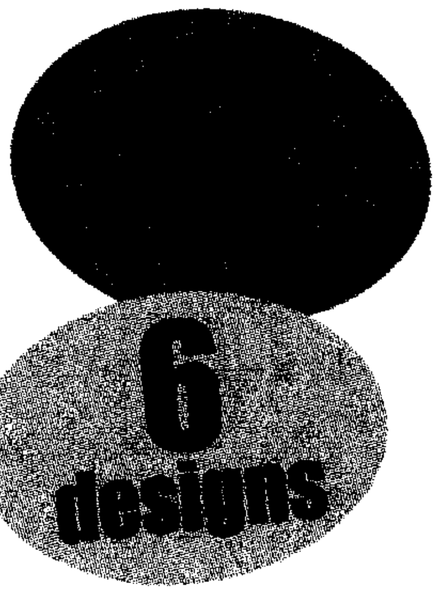

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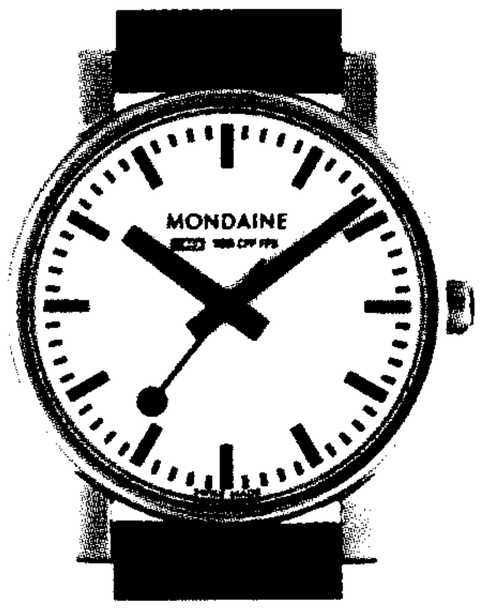

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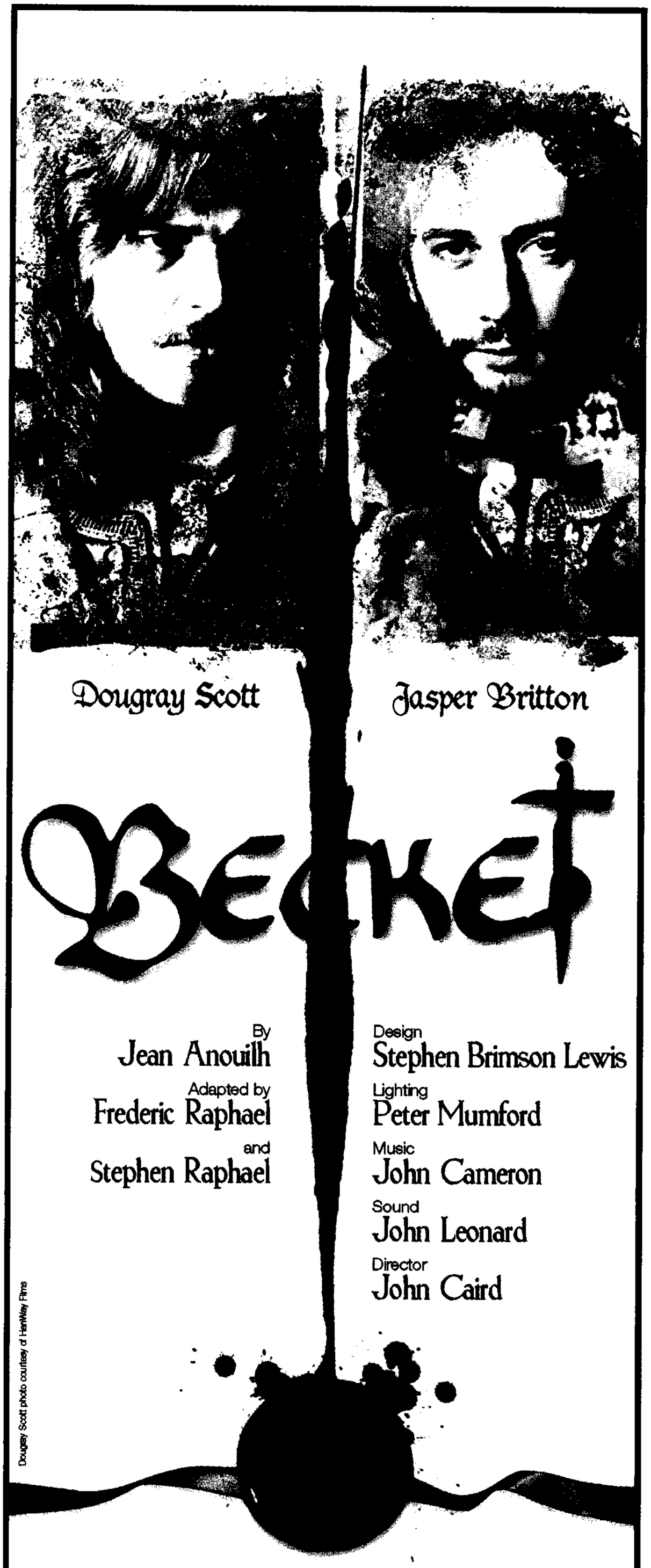

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